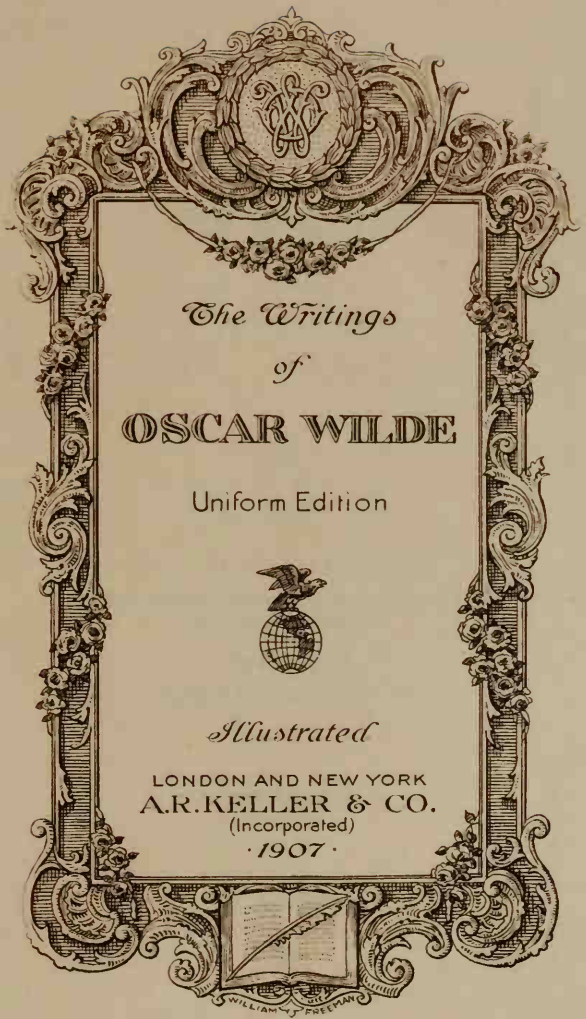
Oscar Wilde in 1895.


The Writings
of
OSCAR WILDE
Uniform Edition
Illustrated
LONDON AND NEW YORK
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WILLIAM J. FREEMAN

UNIFORM EDITION

THE WRITINGS

OF

OSCAR WILDE

De Profundis

FROM THE ORIGINAL, UNEXPURGATED
GERMAN EDITION

Translated by

HENRY ZICK, PH. D.

ILLUSTRATED

London: New York:
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Oscar Wilde in 1895 . . . . *Frontispiece*

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De Profundis.

Translated from the German
By Henry Zick, Ph.D.

Preface to De Profundis.

PREFACE.

On May 25, 1895, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. He had brought about his own downfall by bringing a suit for libel against the Marquis of Queensbery, who had charged him with evil practices, with the result that during the progress of the case, Wilde, the prosecutor, became the defendant. The marquis was acquitted and the poet was put under arrest. At the first trial the jury disagreed and Wilde was allowed to furnish bail and be at liberty, but before a second jury pronounced its sentence, he had been condemned by the world. When he was released from custody, after the first trial, two hotels closed their doors against him; one because a mob was threatening to storm the house. Not since the scandal following Lord Byron's marriage, had London witnessed such an outbreak of popular wrath. Although he would have conferred a favour upon the authorities by leaving the country, Wilde

refused to forfeit his bail, on the ground that such conduct would be contrary to the principles of a gentleman. With head erect, without uttering a word of reproach to his enemies, he remained to meet the nameless misfortune which followed.

More keenly than the cruel punishment inflicted upon him by the authorities, the poet felt the cruel vindictiveness of his countrymen, but English cant had been aroused and demanded its victim. High and low turned against him in common hatred. It seemed as if all London had risen in condemnation. When the news of his conviction reached the crowd gathered in front of the courthouse, the mob danced with joy. The newspapers engaged in an organised crusade against him, and did their utmost to fan the wrath of the Philistines. Wilde's publishers deemed it wise to publicly renounce their rights; the poet's works were confiscated by the police and the theatrical managers dared no longer produce his plays. The name of the condemned writer was struck from the list of the living.

In a moment all his resources became exhausted. His creditors pounced upon his effects and poverty stared him in the face, for he had never practised economy in anything. He could not even pay the costs of his defence, and during his imprisonment

he was compelled to appear twice in the Court of Bankruptcy.

Wilde himself has told us the story of the two years which he spent in prison, first in Wandsworth, and then in Reading, the beautiful little city on the Thames, made famous by his celebrated prison ballad. *De Profundis* was the only work which Wilde wrote while in prison; he himself calls it, in the third of the appended letters, "epistola in carcere et vinculis." That it was written by one in abject bondage, who suffered unspeakable agony in the loneliness of his cell and who, more than once, was on the verge of madness, is apparent in every line of this immortal prose poem. His term of imprisonment had nearly expired when he resolved to depict the Oscar Wilde of the past, the resplendent "King of Life" in all his glory, in contrast with the Wilde of the prison days, purified by suffering and looking forward to the *Vita Nuova.*

Some idea of the mediæval barbarism still prevailing in the prisons of modern, civilised England may be obtained by reading Sherard's biography of Wilde, which states that the poet was confined in a kind of rabbit-cage, with a roof of wire netting. Sentenced to hard labour, he was forced to sew bags

and pull oakum, from morning until night, often with blood oozing from his finger-nails. With these hands, which had long been denied the use of the pen, in the dim twilight of his prison cell, he wrote his heartrending confessions.

To Robert Ross, the literary executor of Oscar Wilde, who, at my urgent request, consented to publish this autobiographical document of his friend, we owe our heartiest thanks. When the work of publishing it was confided to me, an English edition had not yet been planned. The uncertain, confused legal situation, however, made such a publication necessary. This will not rob the German edition of its authentic value, for we were able to bring out our work at an earlier date and in a more complete form. Besides, the English edition is incomplete, because expurgated, and does not contain the four letters which furnish an invaluable commentary on Wilde's remarkable autobiography.

MAX MEYERFELD.

January, 1905.

De Profundis.

DE PROFUNDIS.

. . . . They wish to place me between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade! Let them do so! I will not complain. One of the many lessons which the prison teaches us is this: Things are what they are and will remain unchanged through all eternity. And I do not doubt for one moment that the mediæval libertine and the author of *Justine* will be better company than Sandford and Merton, our juvenile publishers. . . .

It all happened in the first half of November, two years ago. The broad stream of life separates me from a period which now lies in the dim past. One who enjoys his freedom can hardly comprehend such an interval—to him life is full of meaning. But I—I feel as if it all happened yesterday, yea, this very day. The moments of suffering are immeasurably long. They cannot be divided into seasons. We can only note their moods and register their regular recurrence. To the sufferer, time itself seems to stand still—to revolve

about a common centre of agony. Alas, for the paralysing immobility of a life which in every detail is governed by rules and regulations! We eat and drink, we are led out for an airing, lie down and pray—or, rather, kneel in prayer—all in obedience to the rigid rules of an iron law. This immobility, this sameness, which makes every day, in its terror, resemble its brother in every minute detail, seems to affect the forces of Nature, whose very essence is constant change. Here, we know nothing, can know nothing, of sowing or harvesting; nothing of the reapers cutting the wheat, of the vintagers gathering the purple grapes; of the grass in the garden, over which the falling blossoms spread their snow-white garment or which is strewn with ripened fruit.

For us there is but one season, the season of grief and sorrow. Even of sun and moon they have robbed us. In the outer world the light of day may shine in blue or golden hues, but the light which steals its way to us through the opaque, barred window, under which we sit, is grey and dim. Twilight reigns forever in our cells, midnight in our hearts. And even in the realm of thought, as in the realm of time, motion has been changed into inertia. What I had forgotten long

ago or could easily forget now, fills my mind to-day and will occupy it to-morrow. If you consider this you will understand why I am writing, why I write as I do and why I cannot write otherwise.

A week later, and I am brought here. Three months pass by and my mother dies. You know—no one knows it better—how much I loved her—how much I revered her. Her death so overwhelmed me that I—once the master of language—could not find words to express my sorrow and my shame—but even in the zenith of my power I could never have given appropriate expression to such sacred grief or voiced a melody to accompany my unutterable woe. From my mother and father I had inherited a name which had won fame and honour, not only in literature, art, archæology and the sciences, but also in the history of my country. I dishonoured that name for all time to come. I so debased it that it became a hideous by-word in the mouths of hideous men. I dragged it in the very dust. To my enemies it became a synonym for madness. What I had suffered and still suffer, no pen can describe, no book record. My wife, ever kind and considerate, not wishing that I should learn the news from the lips of indifferent stran-

gers, in spite of illness, came all the way from Genoa to England to break to me the news of my irretrievable, my immeasurable loss. All who still remembered me sent tokens of their sympathy. Even strangers, when they heard what new calamity had befallen me in my misery, felt prompted to express their condolence. . . .

Again, three months have passed. The bulletin hanging outside the door of my cell, which records my daily conduct and the amount of work I accomplish, and upon which my sentence is inscribed—tells me it is May. . . .

Happiness and success are of rough texture and vulgar material—the most delicate fabric in all creation is suffering. There is nothing, in the world of the mind, which is equal to the terrible, but exceedingly fine pulsations of suffering. The infinitely thin gold-leaf, which responds to forces that may not be recognised by our senses, is crude in comparison with the sensitiveness of suffering. Suffering is like a wound that bleeds when touched by other than a loving hand, and even then must bleed, though not in pain. . .

Where there is suffering there is sacred ground. Some day humanity will understand what this means. Before one does understand it, one knows

nothing of life. Robbie, and beings like him, possess that understanding. When I was led, between two policemen, from my prison to the Bankruptcy Court, Robbie waited in the long corridor to see me go by. When I passed him, with lowered head and manacled hands, he quietly but earnestly removed his hat in greeting. The surging, noisy crowd stood in silence, touched by this loving act of devotion. Men have entered the kingdom of heaven for lesser deeds. Imbued with the same spirit, the saints knelt down to wash the feet of the poor; filled with the same love, they stooped to kiss the leper's cheek. To this moment I do not know whether he noticed that I was aware of his devotion. The remembrance of it I cherish like a treasure in my heart; mere words do not and cannot express my gratitude. In my heart the act is booked as a secret debt which, I am glad to say, I shall never be able to repay. There it lies embalmed and its loveliness is preserved by the myrrhs and nards of many tears. When all wisdom had proved worthless to me, all philosophy fruitless and barren, when the words of those who tried to console me tasted like dust and ashes in my mouth, the remembrance of that simple, silent act of love opened all the springs of sympathy in my heart,

changed the desert places into gardens of roses, lifted me out of the embitterment of solitude and brought me into harmony with the great, wounded, broken heart of humanity. Whoever is capable of realising not only how beautiful Robbie's action was, but why it meant so much to me and always will mean so much, will also understand how and in what frame of mind he should approach me. . . .

The first offering which a young author makes to the world in the springtime of life should be as unsullied as a blossom in May, as pure as the hawthorn buds on the meadows of Oxford or the primroses in the fields of Cumner. Such a work should not be handicapped by a terrible, revolting tragedy or by overwhelming abuse. To lend my name to herald such a work would have been contrary to the principles of art; it would have placed it in a false *milieu,* and the *milieu* is of paramount importance in art. Complexity and relativity are the distinguishing features of modern life, and form its component parts. To reproduce the former, we need the *milieu,* with its delicate shadings, its suggestiveness, its strange perspective; to reproduce the latter, we require a broad background. For this reason, more than music, painting or sculpture,

literature is, was and ever will be the art *par excellence.*

Every three months I receive from Robbie a résumé of the literary news of the day. Nothing more delightful than his letters can hardly be imagined, nothing more witty, cleverly conceived and written. One can hardly call them letters; they are rather confidential chats; they possess all the excellence of French *causeries.* To pay me a compliment in his delicate manner, he now appeals to my sense of humour, now to my inborn love of beauty and refinement, and reminds me in a hundred ways that I was once looked upon as the *arbiter elegantiarum,* as an authority in artistic circles, yes, by many, as the very highest authority. Robbie thus shows that he not only possesses the finer instincts of friendship but literary tact as well. His letters are, to me, the small links between my present world and the glorious, unreal world of art in which I once ruled as a king, and would still rule had I not allowed myself to be enticed into the under-world of passion, in which our appetites are as degraded as our desires are unsatisfied. Though I am, indeed, grateful to receive any news at all, one can easily understand, or at least readily imagine, that I would prefer to learn

something more about . . . than to be informed that Alfred Austin was about to publish a volume of poems, that . . . is writing critical reviews for the *Daily Chronicle,* or that Mrs. Meynell has been proclaimed the new Sibylla of literary style by one who cannot utter a panegyric without stammering. . . .

Other deplorable creatures, like me, who are imprisoned and denied even a glimpse of the beauty of this world, do not live in constant dread of treacherous traps and poisoned arrows. They are able to conceal themselves in the gloom of their cells as in a holy sanctuary; the world has been satisfied and pursues the even tenor of its way; they are left alone and undisturbed. But I am not so fortunate! One misery after another has found its way to my hiding place and knocked at my prison door. And this door, closed, or as good as closed, to my friends, opens wide to my enemies. On the two occasions that I was obliged to appear in the Court of Bankruptcy, and again when I was publicly conveyed from one prison to another, I was exposed to the insolent gaze and the abusive mockery of the mob. The tidings of my mother's death found me weary and alone; barred from all which might have soothed my ach-

ing heart. Thus I am compelled to bear the double anguish of misery and conscience which the memory of my mother arouses and ever will arouse.

Hardly is this wound closed—it will never really heal—when I receive harsh, bitter, sarcastic letters from my wife's lawyers. Poverty stares me in the face and I am actually blamed for being poor. That might easily be borne. I could even endure worse misfortune. Then my two children are taken from me by the tyranny of the law. The infinite pain, nameless sorrow and boundless grief, which this entails, will never leave me. The thought that the law can decree that I am not a fit person to associate with my own children fills me with terror. The feeling that my imprisonment is a degradation is mild compared with the knowledge that I am a social outcast.

How I envy my fellow-prisoners who, like me, pace monotonously up and down the prison yard. Their children—of this I am sure—are anxiously awaiting their return home, to smother them with demonstrations of love. The poor are wiser than we are; they are more merciful, more kindly; they feel more deeply than we do. In their eyes, imprisonment is a tragic event in their lives, a misfortune, an unfortunate accident, something which

arouses the pity and sympathy of their fellow-men. In their language, one who is condemned to prison is called "unfortunate"; he has met with "misfortune," is the phrase they use; this very expression embodies the highest wisdom of love. It is different with people of our own station, in our own walk of life. If one of us is imprisoned, he becomes a pariah! I, and such as I, have hardly a claim to air and sunshine. Our mere presence sullies the pleasure of others. When we emerge from the prison night, we are unwelcome guests wherever we appear. We are considered unworthy to walk in the light of the sun or moon. We are robbed of our children; the tender ties of paternal and filial love, which join us, more than others, to humanity, are broken. We are condemned to everlasting loneliness. We are denied the one thing which might heal our wounds, revive our spirits, pour balm into our bleeding hearts and bring peace to our grief-harrowed souls. . . .

I confidently believe that neither . . . nor . . . even if they were multiplied a thousand-fold, could have ruined a man like me. I brought about my own downfall. No one, be he high or low, need be ruined by any other hand than his own. Readily as I confess this, there

are many who will, at this time at least, receive the confession sceptically. And although I thus mercilessly accuse myself, bear in mind that I do so without offering any excuse. Terrible as is the punishment inflicted upon me by the world, more terrible is the ruin I have brought upon myself.

I was intimately connected with the art and civilisation of the times. I may even claim that I typified modern culture. In the dawn of manhood I recognised my position, appreciated its significance and compelled the recognition of my contemporaries. Very few persons, during their lifetime at least, ever attained such a distinguished and widely recognised place. This is usually determined by historians and critics—if it is ever determined at all—long after the man and his time are a part of the dim and distant past. My case was different. Byron was the type and symbol of his age, of its passions and its pessimism. My relations were on a higher level; they were based on a desire for nobler, more permanent values; they touched more weighty questions of life and aimed at a higher goal.

The gods had showered on me their most precious gifts. My talent bordered on genius. I enjoyed an honoured name, an eminent social posi-

tion; I possessed fame, glory and intellectual daring; I made of art a philosophy and of philosophy an art; I taught men to think on new lines, for I had presented the world in a new light and in new colours. I astonished every one by what I said and what I did. I took the drama—the most objective of all the forms of art—and made of it something as distinctly subjective as a lyric poem or a sonnet; at the same time I enlarged its field and enriched its world of characters. The drama, the novel, poetry, poetic prose, the polished dialogue of real or imaginary life—all—everything I touched, I clothed in new garments of beauty. I demonstrated the relativity of truth itself, gave to what we call true and what we name false their proper place and proved that the true and the false are only different attitudes of the human intellect. I proved that art was the highest reality, and that life was only a branch of art. I stimulated and fructified the imaginative power of my century, and myths and legends crystallised about my person. I expressed and condensed the philosophical systems into one phrase, all being into one epigram.

Then came the turning-point. I allowed myself to become enslaved by senseless sensuality and ease. I amused myself with being a *flaneur,* a dandy and

a leader of fashion. I surrounded myself with parasites and obsequious flatterers. I wasted my genius and found a strange pleasure in squandering the gift of eternal youth. I had become tired of dwelling on the heights—and descended by my own will into the depths—I eagerly sought new sensations and strange experiences. In the realm of thought I delighted in being paradoxical; in the realm of passion I became attracted by that which is perverse. Desire became a disease, a frenzy, or both. I had no regard for the lives of others. I satisfied my desires whenever it suited me and passed on. I forgot that every act, even the most insignificant act, of daily life, in some degree, makes or unmakes the character; that every occurrence which transpires in the seclusion of the chamber will some day be proclaimed from the housetops. I lost control over myself. I was no longer at the helm, and knew it not. I had become a slave to pleasure—and hideous degradation was the result. One thing only is left to me—complete humility.

I have been in prison now for two years. At times, wild despair has seized me; I gave way to bitter lamentations until my very appearance inspired pity; I surrendered myself to terrible, im-

potent rage; bitterness and contempt filled my heart; my soul shrieked with anguish; but my misery found no voice, my pain no expression. I have experienced all possible degrees of suffering. I now realise what Wordsworth meant when he wrote:

"Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark, and has the nature of infinity."

At times the thought that my suffering was to be endless became unbearable, because it was without meaning, without significance. But now something within myself tells me that nothing in the world is without significance—least of all suffering. This something, hidden deep within me like a treasure in a field—is humility. It is the last and the best virtue which my nature has developed; it is the goal toward which I have been unconsciously striving, or, rather, it is the starting-point of a new development. It sprang from my inmost self, therefore I know that it has appeared at the right time. It could not, in fact, have been evolved before, nor later. If any one had suggested such a virtue, I would have scoffed at the idea. I have found it myself, spontaneously, and

therefore I shall keep it as my very own. I cannot do otherwise. It is the germination, the starting-point of a new life for me, of a *Vita Nuova*. Of all virtues it is the most wonderful. We cannot acquire and possess it unless we renounce everything which we call our own. Only when we have lost everything do we realise that we possess it.

Now that I am firmly convinced that I do possess it, I see plainly and clearly what I have to do, what I must do without fail. But when I say "must," I hardly need to explain that I do not allude to any outward law or command. I am, at present, more of an individualist than ever. I deny the existence of such laws or rather their right to exist. Everything seems to me to be worthless and without intrinsic value, except what we evolve out of our own consciousness. I am in quest of a new form of self-realisation. This is my sole occupation. The first step I shall have to take is to free myself from every vestige of bitterness against the world.

I am without means, without house or home. But that is not the worst suffering one must endure in this world. I say this in all earnestness and sincerity: I shall leave my prison with no enmity against the world and willingly go from door to

door begging for bread. If the houses of the rich be closed against me, I know that the poor will receive me with open hands. Those who possess much are often greedy and hard-hearted. The poor are always ready to share what little they have. It would even be a matter of indifference to me were I forced to sleep, in summer, on the cool grass, or, in winter, to take refuge in a warm hay-loft or under the projecting roof of a stable—if only love were in my heart. The dross and tinsel of life now seem of no value to me whatever. From this, one may realise how far I have advanced on the road to perfect individualism, or, rather, how far I shall progress in time, for the road is long and beset with thorns. I know, of course, that I shall not be compelled to beg for alms on the high-road, and if I ever lie in the cool grass at night it will be to write sonnets to the moon.

When the prison door opens, Robbie will be waiting for me outside, in front of the big gate with the iron posts, and his presence will symbolise not only his own love but that of many others besides him. I am, I believe, to realise enough to assure my living for at least a year and a half, and if I am unable to write any beautiful books I shall be at leisure to read them. But if it were differ-

ent; had I not a single friend left in the world; were there not one on whose house or hospitality I might count, and should I be forced to carry the pouch and wear the ragged cloak of poverty—as long as my soul was free of feelings of revenge, cruelty and contempt, I still would face life with greater peace of mind and confidence than if my body were bedecked with purple and fine linen and my heart were filled with hatred. I shall meet with no difficulties. He who truly desires love will find it waiting for him.

I need hardly say that my task does not end here; otherwise it would be comparatively easy. More difficult problems will have to be solved; steeper heights must be climbed; deeper valleys visited. The strength to accomplish all this I must find within myself. Neither religion, morality, nor reason can aid me. Morality will be of no help to me. I am an antinomist, an opponent of all general laws. I am one of those who believe in privileges and exceptions, but not in rules. I believe that wrong is not measured by acts—by what we do—but by the evil that is within us. This truth is paramount. Religion will be of no help to me. Others may believe in things invisible; I believe in what I can touch, what I can see. My

gods inhabit temples built by the hand of man; my gospel—the gospel of glad tidings—finds its fulfilment in the realm of actuality, of experience—perhaps more completely than is desirable; for like many individuals who seek after heaven on earth, I have found here both the beauty and bliss of heaven and the hideousness and horrors of hell.

Whenever I reflect upon religious matters I have a desire to found an order for those who believe in no religion at all. I would call it the "Brotherhood of Unbelievers." I would erect an altar, upon which stood unlighted candles, unconsecrated bread, and an empty chalice, attended by a priest in whose heart peace had no resting-place. Every true belief should be cast in the mould of religion and the teachings of the agnostics should be ritualised like the creed of the church. Agnosticism has had its martyrs; it should also have its saints, and they should send prayers of thanks to God for keeping Himself concealed from the eyes of men. But whether I become a believer or remain an agnostic, my belief or disbelief must derive its source from within, not from without. I, myself, must create its symbols. The transcendental is that which produces its own form. I will never discover its secret, if I do not find it in my own heart; if I do

not possess it already I shall never be able to acquire it.

Reason, too, will be of no help to me. It tells me that the laws, whose victim I have become, are cruel and unjust; that the social system under which I have been suffering is also cruel and unjust. Yet I must find a place somewhere for these arbiters of my destiny, the laws and the social system, that they may appear just and kind. In art, we busy ourselves only with that which to us is of special interest at a special time; the same holds good in ethics, in the development of character. All I have experienced I must turn to my good. My bed of boards, the coarse food, the oakum that I pulled until my fingers became insensible, the manual labour of cleaning which begins and ends each day, the harsh commands which custom seems to prescribe, the hideous garb which brings our misery into grotesque relief, the silence, the solitude, the infamy—all these experiences I shall endeavour to spiritualise. There is not a single form of physical degradation which I shall not try to exalt to a spiritual plane. I hope that I may some day be able to say honestly and sincerely that my life had two turning points—the first when my father sent me to Oxford, the second when society

sent me to jail. I do not mean to say that this was the best thing that could have happened to me. I would rather put the matter this way—and have it understood by others—that I was such a typical child of the times that, in my perversity and as a result of this perversity, I turned that which was good in my life to evil, and that which was evil to good.

Yet it does not matter what I may say about myself or what others may say about me. The one important task which confronts me and which I must perform before my short span of life is ended is this—all that has been done to me I must, so to speak, absorb into my inner consciousness, make it a part of my being, accept it without complaint, without fear or trembling, without resistance. The supreme vice is doing things by halves. Right is that which has been fully realised and performed.

When I entered prison certain people advised me to forget that such an individual as I ever existed. This was pernicious counsel, for I found consolation only when I began to realise who and what I really was. Now others advise me, when I leave the prison, to forget that I was ever there. To follow their advice would be equally fatal to me.

It would mean that an unbearable feeling of shame would haunt me for the rest of my days; that all those things which mean as much to me as they do to any other man—the beauty of the sun and moon, the splendour of the seasons, the music of the nascent day and the silence of the long nights, the rain dropping gently through the leaves and the dew that creeps over the grass and clothes it with a mantle of silver—all these things would be forever sullied and lose their healing virtue and their power to give joy to my aching heart. To regret our experience is to stunt our development; to disavow it is to give the lie to our whole life. For as the body absorbs different kinds of food, common and unclean, as well as sacred, consecrated by the word of the priest or the visionary's faith, and transforms it into energy and force, into muscular action, into beautiful fleshly forms, the curves of the lips, the sweep of the limbs, the colours of hair and eyes—so does the soul possess its alimentary functions, transforming our vulgar, cruel and debasing passions into noble emotions and aspirations. Yea, it does even more, for the human soul finds the most precious material for its subtle self-activity and perfect manifestation in material which originally was discordant and destructive.

One fact I must accept unconditionally and without equivocation. I have been a common prisoner in a common jail. And, strange as it may appear, one of the lessons which I will have to teach myself is this—I must not be ashamed of the fact. I must feel that my imprisonment is a just punishment, for if we are ashamed to meet the punishment that our sins merit, it were better we had never been subjected to it. On the other hand, I have suffered for deeds which, to my knowledge, I never committed; although there is much in my life which might be laid up against me, and which deserves the severest punishment, for which I have never been called to account. The ways of the gods are shrouded in mystery! They chastise us, not only for that which is good and normal in us, but that which is evil and perverse. Therefore, I must become reconciled to the fact that we are chastened both for the good and the evil we do. And I do not doubt in the least that this is just. It is helpful—or should be helpful—for us to realise this instead of flattering ourselves that we are naturally both good and bad.

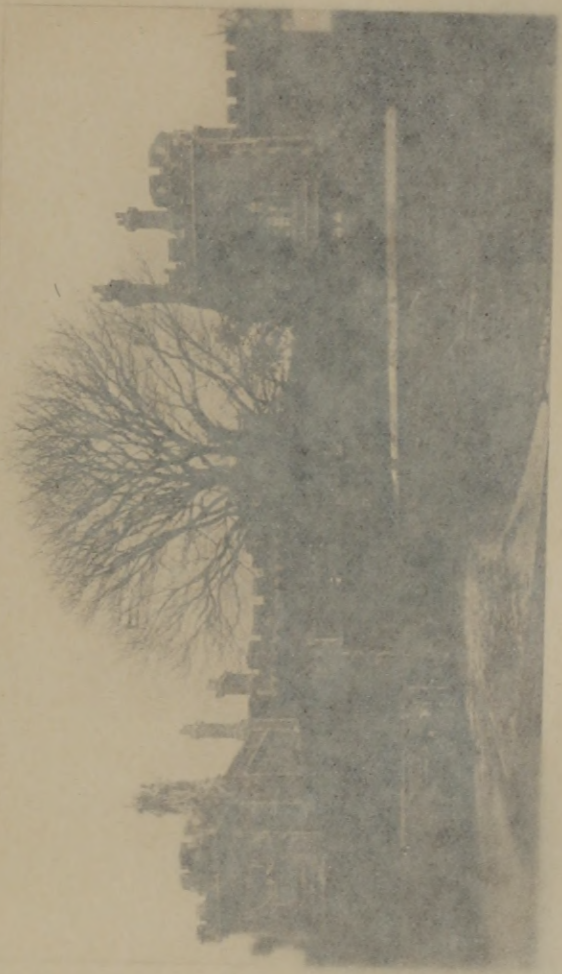
Therefore, if I am not ashamed of my punishment—and I hope I am not—I shall be able to think, to go about, to live as a truly free man.

Many, when they are discharged from prison, carry the memory of their degradation with them into the world and endeavour for a time to hide their shame in the secrecy of their hearts, and, in the end, crawl, like poor poisoned creatures, into a hole and die. It is infamous that one who has suffered the penalty of his sins should be forced to endure never-ending disgrace, and it is a wrong, a grievous wrong, that society leaves him no alternative. After inflicting horrible punishment upon an individual, society feels that it has done its duty, when it has only been half performed. When a man has made amends for his wrongdoing he must work out his destiny alone, for society drops him at the very time its chief duty to the sufferer begins. As if ashamed of its own acts, society avoids those whom it has punished, just as one avoids a creditor whom one is unable to pay, or as some people shun a person whom they have irrevocably and irretrievably wronged.

If I realise all that I have suffered, I demand that society shall realise what it has done to me and what it owes to me; that we should both banish from our hearts all feelings of embitterment and hatred and let the past be forgotten.

I know full well that my position is naturally a

more difficult one than that of the average prisoner. The poor and wretched thieves and vagabonds, who are here in prison with me, are in many respects more fortunate than I. The scene of their sins, the dingy town or the green fields, is quickly traversed; if they wish to live among people who know nothing of their deeds they need only travel as far as a bird may fly between sunset and break of day. But for me, the expanse of the earth has shrunk to the breadth of a hand, and no matter in what direction I may go I shall read my name written in indelible letters. I did not emerge out of the darkness into the glaring light of notoriety, which the unknown criminal enjoys for a brief season—I fell from the pinnacle of immortal fame into the depth of everlasting dishonour, and sometimes it seems to me that I have furnished the proof—if such proof were needed—that it is but one step, or less than a step, from the famous to the infamous. Yet because of the very fact that I shall be recognised and pointed out when I again take my place in the world, and because my whole career or rather the mistakes of my career will be known to every one, my life will have a new and higher meaning, for I shall be forced to reassert and re-establish myself. And the sooner this happens the better,



Reading Gaol

for when I succeed in producing one beautiful work of art, one masterpiece, I shall be able to deprive calumny of its poison and cowardice of its sting, and tear the detractor's tongue from its roots. If life, indeed, prove problematic to me, I shall, no less, be a problem to life; people will have to decide on some *modus vivendi* regarding me. I need not say that I have no particular persons in mind. The only people I would care to associate with are artists and those who have suffered; who know what beauty is and what sorrow means. Others do not interest me. Then, too, I shall have no claims to make on life. All I have said here has reference only to my own spiritual relation to life as a whole. I feel that I must not be ashamed of my punishment. This is one of the first points I must gain in order to attain the ideal, and because I realise my own imperfection.

Then, I must learn how to be happy! There was a time when I knew happiness, or thought I did—instinctively. At that time spring reigned in my heart; it was filled with the joy of living. My life o'erflowed with pleasures, like a cup running over with wine. I now look upon life from a new and different point of view; I often find it difficult to form even a conception of happiness. I remem-

ber—it was in my first term at Oxford—reading in Walter Pater's *Renaissance*—the book which has so strangely influenced my life—how Dante relegated to the depths of the Inferno those who wilfully surrender their souls to sadness, and going to the college library I looked up the passage in the Divine Comedy where these unfortunates are pictured as dwelling in the marshy regions of hell, "sad in the sweet air" and condemned to sigh:

"Tristi fummo
Nell' aer dolce che dal sol s' allegra."

I knew that the church disapproved of "accidia," but this notion seemed to me so wholly fantastic; just the kind of sin, I thought, that an innocent priest might devise. Nor did I, then, understand how Dante, who says in another passage, that "suffering unites us again with God," could be so harsh against those who gave themselves up to melancholy, if there were such. I did not then suspect that some day sadness would be my greatest temptation.

While I was confined in the prison at Wandsworth, I longed to die; it was my sole desire. When, after two months in the infirmary, I was

brought here and my physical condition slowly improved, I stormed with rage. I decided to commit suicide the day I left the prison. This despondency left me, after a while, and I made up my mind to live, but to clothe myself in melancholy, as a king robes himself in purple. I resolved never to smile again, to make every house I entered a house of mourning. My friends were to walk in sadness by my side and move with measured tread; my sorrow was to spoil their joy; I decided to torment them with my own suffering. Now I think differently about all this. It would be ungrateful and uncivil of me to make a wry face whenever my friends visited me, and compel them to make still longer faces, merely to express their sympathy, or ask them to sit down silently, like mourners, and partake of a funeral repast of bitter herbs.

I must learn to be cheerful and happy. The last two times my friends were allowed to visit me here in prison I took pains to be as joyful as possible and to appear in as pleasant a frame of mind as I could command, in order to show them my appreciation of the trouble they had taken in coming all the way from London to see me. I am fully aware that this is only meagre thanks, but I am sure they prefer this method of demonstrating my gratitude

to any other. A week ago last Saturday I was allowed to spend a whole hour in conversation with Robbie; I did my best to make him realise my heartfelt joy at our meeting. The fact that for the first time since sentence was pronounced against me I desire most eagerly to return to the world proves to me that the views and convictions I have formed here are right and just. There is so much before me, so much to be done, that I would look upon it as a terrible calamity should I die before I had had a chance to realise at least a part of my work. I see before me new possibilities of development in art and in life, each of which points to the attainment of the ideal. I long to live, so as to be able to study life and the world which are as good as new to me now.

Would you like to know what this new world is? No doubt you can guess it. It is the world in which I have been living for the past two years. Suffering and all its lessons—that is my new world. My former life was devoted to pleasure alone. To pain and care I gave a wide berth; they were not to my taste. I made it a habit not to pay the slightest attention to them, to look upon them as infirmities. They had no place in the economy of my life, no place in my system of philosophy.

My mother, who knew life through and through, used to quote to me very often a verse of Goethe's which, many years ago, Carlyle had written in one of her books and which, as I remember it, ran, in his translation, thus:

Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,—
He knows you not, you heavenly powers.

The noble Queen Louise of Prussia, whom Napoleon treated so brutally, exiled and feeling keenly the humiliation of her country, often quoted these lines. My mother, too, frequently quoted them when trouble visited her in her later years. I emphatically declined to subscribe to or even admit the great truth hidden in them. I could not then grasp it. I remember telling my mother that I had no desire to eat my bread in sorrow, to spend my nights weeping and waiting for a still sadder morrow. I did not then guess that this was to be one of the special experiences which the Fates held in store for me, that I was to spend a whole year in doing hardly anything else but weeping and waiting, and the Fates have given me full measure.

During the past few months I have succeeded, after many a hard struggle with myself, to grasp a few of the lessons hidden in a heart filled with grief.

Preachers, and people who repeat stereotyped phrases by rote and without reason, often speak of suffering as a mystery; in fact, it is a revelation. The sufferer realises things he never understood before. He begins to look at history from a different angle of vision. What one has conjectured but feebly and instinctively in the realm of art, now becomes perfectly real in the realm of thought and feeling. I now realise that suffering as the noblest emotion of which man is capable, is, as it were, the type and touchstone of art, of the highest art.

What the artist strives to realise is that state of being in which body and soul are an entity, in which the material is an expression of the spiritual, in which the essence of things finds its perfect expression. There are many such states of being; youth, and the arts whose object is the presentation of youth, may serve us occasionally as models; again, we may find pleasure in thinking that modern landscape painting, by the delicacy and subtlety with which it expresses impressions, by the manner in which it suggests the spiritual which

hovers about the inanimate and weaves for itself a garment out of air and mist, out of fields and cities, by its morbidly sensitive harmony of moods, tones and colours, has realised for us what was realised in such perfection by the sculpture of Greece. Music, in which all form and matter are so completely absorbed that they melt into one, is a complex example, and a flower or a child a simple example of the idea which I am striving to express in words; but suffering is the final type both in life and in art.

Laughter and mirth may hide a harsh and stern disposition, but behind suffering nothing can be found but suffering. Pain wears no mask like joy. Truth in art does not consist in the alternate action and reaction of the idea and its accidental realisation; it is not the resemblance between the thing and its shadow, or between the image of a body in a crystal and the body itself; neither is it an echo resounding from a hollow mountain, nor the silvery spring in the valley, in whose waters the moon and Narcissus gaze on their reflected images. Truth in art is the unity, the oneness, of a thing and its idea, the phenomenon expressive of the idea, the soul projected into the flesh, the body become one

with the spirit. Therefore, sorrow or suffering is, beyond comparison, perfect truth.

At times suffering seems to embody all truth. Other feelings may be delusions of the eye or stomach, blinding the former and surfeiting the latter; out of suffering was the universe evolved; the birth of a star and a child are accompanied with pain, by suffering. More than this, suffering has an independent existence; it is a reality in itself.

I have said before that I held a representative position in the art and culture of my age. Every one of the wretched creatures in this house of misery, every one of my fellow-prisoners, is symbolically related to the secret of life, is typical of life itself. For suffering is the secret, the very essence of life. It is hidden behind everything. When we enter life, the sweet meets us with such sweetness, the bitter with such bitterness, that naturally our whole desire is for the joys of life. We wish to live on honey, not only for a month or two, but for all time, entirely forgetting that we are starving our souls.

Once—I remember it well—I spoke of these things to one of the most beautiful women I ever knew, one whose generous sympathy and noble

kindness, shown to me both before and during my imprisonment, have been indescribable and truly sublime—who, more than any one else in the whole wide world, has helped me to bear the burden of my sorrows, though she may never have been and is not now aware of it. And all this she did by the mere fact of her existence, because she is just what she is; because she embodies an ideal as well as a beneficent power, an example to follow, an inspiring, convincing force on the road towards the ideal. She is a soul who imparts sweetness to the commonplaces of every-day life, who makes the spiritual appear as simple and natural as the light of the sun, or the ocean, from whose eyes beauty and suffering shine forth in unison and bear the same message. I remember very distinctly that on the occasion I have in mind I said: "In the narrowest lane in London there is misery enough to prove that God does not love mankind. The whole face of creation is disfigured wherever any human being is suffering, be it only a little child that sits weeping in a garden, guilty or not guilty of some wrongdoing." I was entirely mistaken. She told me so, but I would not admit it. I could not admit it, for such a view of things was foreign to the world of ideas in which I then lived.

Now I believe that love of some kind is at the bottom of the immense mass of woe existing in the world. In fact, I am convinced of it; it alone furnishes an adequate explanation of suffering. If the universe is, as I said, built of suffering, then suffering has been fashioned by the hand of love; in no other way can the soul of man, for whom the world was created, develop to its full growth and perfection.

When I say that I am convinced of this, I betray too much vanity; in the distance, like a pearl without a flaw, the City of God can be seen by mortal eyes. It shines so wonderfully clear and appears so near that one might think a child could reach it on a bright summer's day. And a child could reach it, too. It's different with me and those like me. We can realise a thing in one fleeting moment, but we lose sight of it again in the long hours which follow with feet of lead. It is hard to walk always on the heights; as is the right of the soul. Our thoughts belong to Eternity, but we ourselves progress but slowly through time. How slowly time passes for us who live in prison, I need not to say, neither need I to speak of the ennui and despair which steal so persistently into our prison cells and the cells of our hearts, that one is,

perforce, obliged to clean and adorn one's house for their reception, as for an unwelcome visitor, for a stern master or a slave whose slave one has become, by chance or by choice.

My friends may find it hard to believe, but nevertheless true that for those who enjoy liberty and idle luxury it is much easier to learn the lesson of humility than it is for me who begin the day by scrubbing the floor of my prison-cell. For life in prison, with its numberless restrictions and privations, makes one a rebel. The most terrible feature of life in prison is not that it breaks one's heart—for it is the destiny of the heart to be broken—but that our hearts are turned into stone. Sometimes I feel as if only brazenness and scorn could help me to live through the day. But he whose heart harbours feelings of rebellion cannot receive grace—to use the favourite phrase of the church. And justly so, I may add; for in life, as well as in art, a rebellious mood blocks the avenues of the soul and shuts out the free air of heaven. But if I am to learn the lesson of humility at all, I must learn it here and now; and I must be filled with joy if my feet tread the right road and my face is turned towards "the gate which is called beautiful,"

though I may sometimes fall in the dust or go astray in the mist.

This "New Life," as I often love to call it in memory of Dante, is really no new life at all, but simply the process of self-development, the continuation and further evolution of my past life.

One beautiful morning, when I was at Oxford—in the year before I graduated—while walking with one of my friends in the paths around Magdalen College, musical with birds, I said that I felt tempted to eat of the fruits of every tree in the garden of life; that I would enter the world with this passionate desire in my heart. And thus, in very truth, I entered life, and thus I lived. The only mistake I made was that I confined myself exclusively to eating fruit from the trees which stood in that part of the garden which was flooded by the golden light of the sun, while I avoided those which stood in the shade and gloom. Failure, shame, poverty, cares, despair, suffering, even tears, the words born of sorrow and remorse, which strew our path with thorns, the conscience which condemns, the self-abasement which punishes, the misery which sprinkles ashes on the head of the sufferer, the anguish of the soul that is clothed in sackcloth and makes bitter every drink—all these

I carefully avoided. And since I had made up my mind to refuse to become acquainted with them, the Fates decreed that I should learn to know them one by one, that I should taste them, feed on them, be for a time without any other food.

I do not regret for one moment that I have lived a life of pleasure. I lived it to its full measure, as one should do everything. There was no form of pleasure which I did not experience. The pearl of my soul I threw into a cup of wine. To the sound of flutes I walked down the flowery path of dalliance. I lived on honey. But it would have been a mistake to have continued this sort of life, because it would have been narrow and one-sided. I was drawn further on. The other half of the garden, too, was to disclose its secrets to me.

That much of this is foreshadowed in my writings may easily be imagined. Traces of it are seen in *The Happy Prince,* also in the fairy-tale, *The Young King,* especially in that passage where the bishop says to the kneeling youth: "Is not He who made misery wiser than you are?" When I wrote this sentence it seemed to me no more than a mere empty phrase. Still more of this thought is secretly hidden in the warning voice which may be heard all through the story of *Vivian Gray;* it

shines in many colors in the essay, *The Critic as an Artist;* it stands revealed, in letters easily read by any one, in *The Soul of Man.* It is voiced, again and again, like the burden of a song in *Salome,* which thus resembles a musical composition, or a well-linked ballad; it has assumed flesh and blood in the prose-poem which tells of an artist whose task it was to fashion from the bronze of the statue of "the Pleasure that abideth for a moment" an image of "the Sorrow that endureth forever." It could not have been otherwise; it was so to be. One is, in every moment of one's life, what one will be no less than what one is or has been. Art is symbolic, for man is a symbol.

If I can ever reach the goal, humility will be the last and highest stage of my development as an artist. The artist must prove that he possesses humility by accepting his experiences unconditionally, just as love in an artist is simply his sense of beauty, by which he reveals to the world its body and its soul. Walter Pater, in his novel, *Marius the Epicurean,* attempts to depict the unity of artistic and religious life, taking religion in the deep, the sweet, and also the stern meaning of the word. But Marius is little more than a mere spectator—an ideal spectator, to be sure, one who has the gift

"to view the spectacle of life through the medium of his own emotions," which Wordsworth claims to be the true mission of the poet; yet only a spectator, after all, who is too much occupied with studying the lovely carving of the benches in the temple, to see the temple of sorrow itself. I see a closer and more direct connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist.

The thought fills me with great joy that, long before sorrow took hold of me and bound me on its rack, I had written in the *Soul of Man* that he who wishes to lead a Christ-like life must be absolutely and entirely himself, taking for example not merely the shepherd on the moor and the prisoner in his cell, but also the painter, to whom the world is but a passing show, and the poet, to whom the world is a song.

I said once to André Gide, as we sat together in a Paris café, that metaphysics did not interest me much, and ethics not in the least; but all that Plato and Christ had said, I claimed, could be transplanted into the realm of art, without change, and find there its complete fulfilment. In its generalisation, this dictum of mine was just as wide as it was new. It is not alone the close relationship of personality and perfection which we readily see

in Christ that forms the real distinguishing feature between classicism and romanticism and makes Christ appear as the true herald of the romantic movement in life, but the kernel of His being which was the same as that which constitutes the artist, strong, fervid imagination.

He possessed, in a paramount degree, that soul-and-mind quality which enters into the understanding of all human relations, that sympathetic imagination, which is the sole secret of artistic creation. He understood the disease of the leper, the night of the blind, the grim misery of the devotees of pleasure, and the strange poverty of the rich. Some one wrote to me in my misery: "When you are not on your pedestal you are uninteresting." How far this writer was from understanding and practising—what Matthew Arnold calls the "secret of Jesus"! Both could have taught him that what happens to your neighbour, happens to you. If you wish to have a text which you may read by day and by night, in sorrow and in joy, then write on the walls of your house, for the sun to gild it and the moon to bathe in silvery light: "Whatever happens to me, happens to another."

Christ is a true poet. His whole conception of humanity sprang from the power of imagination

and can only be grasped by it. Man was to Him what God is to the pantheist. He, first, conceived all the different races of man as one, as a unity.

Before Christ there had existed on one side gods, and on the other men; He felt, by some mysterious sympathy, that both were incarnate in Himself, and, therefore, He calls Himself now the Son of God, now the Son of Man, just as it occurred to Him. More than any one in all history, He infuses into us that receptiveness for the wonderful, to which romantic art makes its appeal. There is even now to me something almost incredible in the idea that a young Galilean peasant could imagine that He had the power to take upon and carry on His shoulders the burden of the whole world: all that had been done and suffered, and all the deeds and suffering of the future: the sins of Nero, of Cæsar Borgia, of Alexander VI, and the sins of him who was emperor of Rome and Priest of the Sun: the suffering of all whose name is Legion and who dwell among the graves: the enslaved nations, the children in factories, thieves, prisoners, outcasts, those who bear their yoke in silence and whose silence is only heard by God. And He not only imagines it, He actually does it, so that at this very moment all who come in touch with Him, even if

they do not bow before His altar or kneel before His priests, feel, somehow, that the ugliness of their sins is taken from them, and the beauty of their suffering has been revealed.

I have said that Christ must be counted among the poets. And that is true. Shelley and Sophocles are His brethren. And His whole life is a wonderful poem. He lived poetry and tragedy, too. If one looks for "fear and pity," there is nothing in the whole range of Greek tragedy which can compare with the life of Christ. The spotless, immaculate purity of the Protagonist raises the whole structure to such a height of romantic art that the tragedies of the House of Œdipus and the House of Pelops are excluded by their very horror, and this shows how false is the assertion of Aristotle, in his treatise on the drama, that the sight of guiltless, innocent suffering was unbearable. Neither in Æschylus nor in Dante, those stern masters of tenderness, nor in Shakespeare, the most purely humane of all the great artists, nor in all the Celtic myths and legends, in which the loveliness of the world shines forth through a veil of tears and in which the life of man is of no more value than the life of a flower, in all these there is nothing that in simplicity of suffering—which

goes hand-in-hand with the most exalting sublimity and results in the grandest tragedy—can compare with, or even approach to, the last act of Christ's Passion. The simple meal with His disciples, of whom one has already sold Him for filthy gain; the agony of soul in the calm, secluded, moonlit garden; the traitor-friend stepping up to Him to betray Him with a kiss; the friend who still believes in Him and on whom, as on a rock, he had meant to build a refuge for humanity, denying Him when the cock's crow announced the break of day; His complete isolation, His submissiveness and readiness to bear any and everything;—and then, in contrast to this, such scenes as the orthodox high-priest tearing his garment in anger and wrath; the representative of civil authority sending for water in the vain hope of cleansing himself from the stain of innocent blood which brands him in history as the scarlet man; the crowning of Christ with thorns—one of the most wonderful and powerful scenes ever depicted in any book—the crucifixion of the Innocent One before the eyes of His mother and the disciple whom He loved so dearly; the soldiers gambling and casting dice for His garments; the terrible death which became symbolic for the world for all time to come; and, at

last, the entombment in the sepulchre of the rich man, His body anointed with costly and sweet-smelling spices and wrapped in Egyptian linen, as if he had been a king's son; if one views all this from the vantage ground of art, one must be grateful that the most solemn church service is the presentation of the tragedy without the shedding of blood: the mystical presentation of Christ's Passion by means of dialogue, costumes and gestures; and the thought has always been to me a source of reverential joy that we find in the ministrant who utters the responses, while the priest is celebrating the mass, the last remnant of the Greek chorus that otherwise would have been entirely lost to art.

Yet the life of Christ, considered as a whole—so completely can suffering and beauty in their deeper significance and in their tangible manifestation melt into one—is in reality an idyl, in spite of the fact that it ends with the rending of the curtain in the temple, that at His death darkness covers the earth and a stone is rolled before the entrance of the sepulchre. Christ is usually represented as a young bridegroom—in the midst of His disciples He called Himself so—or as a shepherd who drives his herd through valleys in search of green meadows or cool streams, or as a singer who tries

to build out of music the walls of the City of God, or as a lover whose tender heart embraces the whole world. His miracles seem to me as sweet as the approach of spring and just as natural. I can readily believe that His personality possessed such charm and magic power that His mere presence brought peace to those whose heart was tormented by anguish; that those who touched His garments or His hands forgot their suffering; that when He walked along the highroads, people whose eyes had been blind to the secret of life understood all mystery; that others, whose ears were closed to every voice but that of pleasure, heard for the first time the voice of love and found it "as sweetly musical as Apollo's lyre"; that at His approach evil passions fled from those who had been held in bondage, and that men whose dull, unimaginative lives had been only another form of death, were raised, as it were, from the grave when He called them; that the multitude to which He preached on the slope of the hill forgot hunger and thirst and worldly cares, and that His friends, when they sat with Him at table, relished the coarse food, to them the water tasted like costly wine, and that the whole house seemed to be filled with the fragrance of nards.

Ernest Renan says, somewhere in his *Life of Christ*—the charming fifth gospel which one might call the gospel according to St. Thomas—that the greatest achievement of Christ consisted in His retaining after His death the love which He had inspired during His life. If His place be among the poets, He surely leads the procession of those who love. He recognised that Love was the secret spring of life for which the wise men had been searching, and that you can touch the heart of the leper or approach the throne of God if you have love in your heart. But above all, Christ is the most perfect individualist. Humility is only a form of revelation, like all the experiences of an artist. Christ is always in quest of the soul of man. He calls it "God's kingdom"—*ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*—and He finds it in every human being. He compares it to small, simple things: a seed, a handful of leaven, a pearl, for the reason that one can purify and improve one's soul only by getting rid of all passions foreign to its nature, all acquired culture, all material possessions, whether useful or harmful.

I refused to realise and to receive this truth with all the force of an obstinate will and all the power of a rebellious spirit until I had lost everything I

possessed in this world except Cyril. My name, my position, happiness, liberty, fortune: all were gone. One precious possession alone consoled me—my sons. Suddenly they, too, were taken from me by the law of the land. This blow completely stunned me; I did not know which way to turn. I sunk to my knees, bent my head, wept and said: "The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am unworthy of either." And in this moment I felt that I was saved. Then and there I realised that there was nothing left for me but to take my burden upon myself and bear it to the end. Since then—no doubt it sounds strange—since then I have been far happier.

I had reached the last phase in the development of my soul. In many respects I had been its enemy, but I found that it had been waiting for me as a good friend. When one comes in touch with one's own soul, one becomes as simple as a child, as one should, according to the words of Christ. It is sad to see how few succeed, before death, in "possessing their soul." Emerson says that there is nothing more rare in a man than self-activity, an act prompted by his real self, his own will. And he is right. Most people are really—other people. Their thoughts are the opinions of

others, their lives are imitations of the lives of others; their passions are not original, they are quotations. Christ was not only the greatest individualist, He was the first in history. Some have tried to make Him out a commonplace philanthropist on the pattern of the frightful humanitarian of the nineteenth century; others have placed Him in the rank of altruists—ignorant and sentimental visionaries. In fact, He was neither the one nor the other. To be sure, He had compassion on the poor, the prisoners, the lowly and unfortunate, but He had still more pity for the rich, the irredeemable hedonists, for those who squander their freedom and become slaves to pleasure, for those who strut about in soft garments and live in kings' mansions. Riches and luxurious living He looked upon as greater calamities than poverty and suffering. As to His altruism—who knew better than He did that it is not our free will which determines our resolutions and actions, and that thorns do not bear grapes, and thistles do not bring forth figs? Neither did He teach that we should make it our life's calling to live for others; at least this was not the foundation of His faith. When Christ says: "Forgive your enemies," He advises us to do so, not so much for our enemies' sake, but for

our own, and because to love is more beautiful than to hate.

When He advises the rich youth: "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor," He has in mind not so much the condition of the poor, but the soul of the youth, the beautiful soul which, with all his riches, was in dire need. In His conception of life He is one with the artist who knows well that in consequence of the immutable law of self-development the poet is bound to sing, the sculptor to express his thoughts in marble and bronze, the painter to reflect the world in the mirror of his moods as surely as the hawthorn must bloom in spring, and the wheat ripen into golden ears, and the moon in its prescribed orbit change from full to crescent and from crescent to full.

Though Christ did not teach men the lesson: "Live for one another," He showed them that there was no difference between the lives of others and our own. Thereby He enlarged man's personality to Titanic proportions. Since He appeared among men the history of every single individual is, or, at least, may become, the history of humanity. No doubt civilisation has heightened man's personality. Art has a myriad of spiritual aspects. One who possesses the artistic temperament goes with Dante

into exile and learns how bitter the bread of others may be and how steep the road they travel, shares for a moment the serenity and calm of Goethe and yet knows only too well that Baudelaire cried to God: "O Seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage de contemples mon corps et mon cœur sans dégoût!"

He learns from Shakespeare's sonnets—to his own harm, maybe—the secret of love and makes it his own; he looks at modern life with different eyes when he has listened to one of Chopin's nocturnes, or has studied the art of Greece, or has read the story of the passion of a dead man for a dead woman, whose hair resembled fine threads of gold, whose mouth was like a pomegranate.

But this congenial sympathy of the artistic temperament is confined to what has already found expression in words or colours, in tones or in marble, behind the painted masks of a drama by Æschylus or through the reeds of the pan-pipe of a Sicilian shepherd, and the man and his love-message must have been revealed. The artist can comprehend life only by reflecting it in some material or form. What cannot be voiced is mute and dumb to him. It was different with Christ. With a power of imagination, wonderful and comprehen-

sive, which fills one with holy awe, He chose for His kingdom the whole world of the inexpressible, the world of sorrow and suffering, which is voiceless and silent, and He made Himself its spokesman. Those who are dumb in their misery and "whose silence is only heard by God," He made his brothers. He strove to be the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, and to give voice to the lips of those whose tongues were tied. His desire was to be a trumpet through which the myriads, who had not the power of speech, might raise their cry up to heaven. And since Christ the artist—to whom suffering and sorrow were forms through which He found His idea of beauty expressed—realised that an idea has no value until it becomes incarnate in some image, He made himself the image of suffering, and as such He has stimulated and dominated art as no Greek god ever did.

For the gods of Greece were, in reality, not what they appeared to be, in spite of the red and white tints of their beautiful, soft bodies. The noble, arched forehead of Apollo resembled the sun when it rises above a hill at dawn, and his feet were like the wings of the morning, but he himself was cruel towards Marsyas and robbed Niobe of her children. In Athena's steel-blue eyes dwelled no mercy for

Arachne; the dignity and the peacocks of Hera were all that were distinguished and noble about the goddess; and the Father of the Gods loved too well the daughters of men.

The two most deeply significant figures in Greek mythology were, in religion, Demeter, a goddess of the earth, not of Olympus, and Dionysius, the son of a mortal woman, to whom the moment of his birth was at the same time the moment of her death.

But life, human life, from the lowliest and simplest sphere, produced a much more gloriously wondrous being than Proserpina's mother or Semele's son. An infinitely greater personality than ever conceived by myths or legends, went forth from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, a personality which was strangely destined to teach to the world the mysterious significance of wine and reveal to it the true beauty of the lilies of the fields as none ever did on Cithæron or at Enna. "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our face from him." These words of Isaiah referred to Christ, and the prophecy was fulfilled in Him.

We need not to hesitate to use this phrase. Every work of art is the embodiment of an idea, its ma-

terialisation. Every human being should be the realisation of an ideal, either in the eyes of God or of men. Christ found the type prepared and realised it, and the dream of a Virgilian poet, in Jerusalem or Babylon, was fulfilled after centuries through Him for whose advent the world had been waiting. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men"; by this, as Isaiah meant, the new ideal was to be known.

As soon as art began to understand the meaning of those words, it opened like the calyx of a flower in the presence of Him in whom the truth in art became manifest as never before. For, as I said above, is it not truth in art when the soul becomes flesh, the body one with the spirit, and its true form revealed?

In all history I know of nothing which is more to be regretted than that the Christian Renaissance, which had produced the Chartres Cathedral, the cycle of the legends about King Arthur, the life of St. Francis of Assisi, the art of Giotto and Dante's *Divine Comedy,* was not allowed to progress on its well-defined road, but was checked and ruined by the miserable classical Renaissance which gave us Petrarch and Raphael's frescoes and Pal-

ladio's architectural art and the stiff and form-bound French tragedies and St. Paul's Cathedral and Pope's poems and each and everything which comes from without and is conceived according to rigid, lifeless rules, instead of flowing from the living spirit within. But everywhere, where art is romantic, we find somehow, in one form or another, Christ or Christ's spirit. He is in *Romeo and Juliet,* in *A Winter's Tale,* in Provençal poetry, in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner,* in *La Belle Dame sans Merci,* and in Chatterton's *Ballad of Mercy.*

We owe to Him the most diverse things and beings: *Les Misérables* by Hugo, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal,* the note of misery and sympathy in Russian novels, the stained glass and tapestry and the quattro-cento works of Burne-Jones and of Morris; Verlaine and his poems we owe to Him, as well as the bell-tower of Giotto, Lancelot and Guinevere, Tannhäuser, the romantic, awe-inspiring sculpture of Michelangelo, the Gothic pointed-arch and the love of children and flowers—for there was little room for both in classic art, hardly enough for them to grow and to play in, but from the twelfth century down to our own time they appeared again and again under different

forms and at different times, whimsical and self-willed as flowers and children are apt to be.

In spring we always feel as if the flowers had been in hiding and step out into the light of the sun only through fear that grown-up people might become tired of looking for them and give up the quest. And the life of a child is like a day in April, when the daffodils are now drenched by rain, now basking in sunshine.

The imaginative element in Christ's personality makes Him the pulse and centre of romanticism. The strange tropes in the poetic drama and in many ballads are produced by the imagination of others, but Jesus of Nazareth created Himself, as it were, by the power of His own imagination. The prophecy of Isaiah had in reality no more to do with Christ's appearance than the song of the nightingale has to do with the rising of the moon; no more, no less. Christ disappointed as many expectations as He fulfilled. Bacon says: "Some strange symmetry lies in all beauty," and Christ says of those who are born in the spirit, that is, who are dynamic forces like He Himself, that they are like unto the wind which "bloweth where it listeth and no man can tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth." That is the reason Christ ap-

peals to artists with such magic power. His are the many-coloured elements of life; Mystery, novelty, pathos, inspiration, ecstasy, love. He addresses those who believe in miracles and He engenders that mood, that disposition and mind by which alone He can be understood. The thought fills me with joy, that, if the essence of Christ's being is an all-comprehensive imagination, the world is made of the same material.

I said in *Dorian Gray* that the great sins of the world are committed in the brain. The brain, in fact, is the sole agent. We do not realise that we do not see with the eye and do not hear with the ear. Eye and ear are, in reality, only suitable conduits for the sense-impressions. The colour of the moon, the fragrance of the apple, the song of the lark, exist in and through the brain.

For some time I have been studying, with great fervour and zeal, the four prose-poems which tell the story of Christ. On Christmas I succeeded in procuring a Greek Testament, and every morning, after I had put my cell in order and cleaned my tin dishes, I read the gospels, about a dozen verses which I picked out at random. It is a delightful way of beginning the day. Every one should do so, even if he leads a stormy, ill-regulated life. Con-

stantly repeating the gospels at any and all seasons has, as it were, run them into the ground so that their simplicity, freshness and romantic charm have been almost wholly lost. We hear them read far too often and far too badly; and too much repetition kills the spirit. But when we turn to the Greek Testament we feel as if we stepped from a close, dark room into a garden of lilies. I derive double pleasure from the thought that we have in the Greek text the very words of Christ, the *ipsissima verba.*

Formerly the opinion prevailed that Christ spoke in Aramaic. Even Renan held this view. We now know that the peasants in Galilee used two languages, like the Irish peasants of to-day, and that Greek was the common language of intercourse in Palestine, even throughout the whole Orient. I had never been able to reconcile myself to the thought that we should know Christ's words only through the translation of a translation. I think, with rapture, that Charmides might have listened to Christ and have conversed with Him; that Socrates and Plato might have philosophised with Him, and that He really said the words: "Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός"; that, when He mentioned the lilies in the fields, "who toil not neither

do they spin," that these were His exact words: *"Καταμάθετε τὰ χρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνει · οὐ χοπιᾶ, οὐδὲ νήθει"*; and that His last cry of anguish, according to St. John, was: *"Τετέλεσται"*—and nothing else.

When I read the gospels—especially that of St. John, or whatever Gnostic of the early Christian era who assumed his name and mantle—I see that the foundation of all life, spiritual and material, is the manner in which pure imagination manifests itself. I further realise that imagination, "fantasia," was to Christ merely a form of love, and that love was lord and master, in the fullest sense of the word.

About six weeks ago, the physician allowed me to have wheat bread at dinner instead of the coarse, black or brown bread, the usual prison-fare. Here in prison it is considered a delicacy by everybody. It means so much to me that after each meal I carefully gather the crumbs which remain on my tin plate or on the coarse cloth which I use to cover my table. I do this not from hunger—for now I get plenty to eat—but simply so that I may not waste anything that is given me. One should do the same with love. Like all fascinating personalities, Christ possessed the gift not only of saying

beautiful things Himself, but also of making others speak in the language of beauty. I love the story which St. Mark tells us of the Greek woman who, when Christ—in order to test her faith—told her He could not give her the bread of the children of Israel, answered: "The small dogs—*χυνάρια* —under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

Most people live *for* love and admiration; we should live *by* love and admiration. If we are shown love, we should realise and acknowledge that we are not worthy of it. Nobody really deserves to be loved. The fact that God loves man proves that it is in the divine order of spiritual blessings that eternal love shall be given to the eternally unworthy. Or, if this sounds too severe, we may say that every one deserves love except he who thinks he is worthy of it. One should receive the sacrament of love on our knees, and the "Domine, non sum dignus" should be on the lips and in the hearts of those who receive it.

If I should ever write again, that is, produce a work of art, I would like to express myself on—and through—two themes: one is, "Christ, the Herald of the Romantic Movement in Life"; the other is, "The Life of the Artist and the Art of Life." The first, of course, is exceedingly tempting; for I

find in Christ not only the essentials of the highest romantic type, but also the accidentals and even the sudden surprises of the romantic temperament. He was the first to admonish man to live the life of a flower. He coined the expression. The children were, in His opinion, the models after which we should fashion ourselves. He held them up to the parents as examples to be followed; this is, to my mind, the main purpose of children, if what is perfect has a purpose. Dante describes the soul of man, as it leaves the hand of the Creator, as "crying and laughing like a little child," and Christ, too, was of the opinion that the soul of every human being should be a "guisa di fanciulla che piangendo e redendo pargoleggia."

He knew that life meant change, flow, action, and that it would be death if one should try to force it into an unyielding form. He also realised that men should not take too seriously the material things of life, that is, spend too much thought on them; that to be unpractical and unworldly was a sign of greatness. The birds in the sky did not worry about the morrow, why should men? Is it not exquisite when He says: "Take no thought for the morrow. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?" A Greek might

have put the last question, it expresses so fully Greek thought and feeling. But Christ alone could have asked both questions and comprised in both the sum total of life.

Christ's ethical teaching is, as it should be, based on pity, compassion, sympathy. If He had said nothing else but: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much," it would have been worth while dying for such words. His justice is—just what justice should be—poetical justice. The beggar enters the kingdom of heaven because he has been unfortunate; I can imagine no better reason. Those who work but one hour in the vineyard in the cool of the evening receive just as much as those who toiled all day in the heat of the sun. And why not? Probably none of them really deserved anything at all; or the former were workers of a different kind.

Christ had no patience with dull, deadening, mechanical systems which look upon human beings as if they were mere things, and, consequently, treat them all alike. Laws He did not acknowledge, only exceptions, as if everybody and everything in the world was unlike everybody or everything else. That which is the keynote in romantic art, was for Christ the natural basis of real life.

He knew no other one. When they brought a woman before Him who had been taken in adultery and pointed out to Him the sentence which the law prescribed in such a case, and asked Him what, in His opinion, should be done, He wrote, with his finger, upon the ground, as if He did not hear their question, and when they insisted upon an answer He looked up and said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." It was worth while living to have said such words.

Like all poets, Christ loved the unlearned. He knew that in the soul of an ignorant man there is always room for a great idea. But He could not endure dullards or stupid people, especially those whom education and learning had made stupid: people whose heads are full of thoughts which they do not understand—a type which has been largely developed in our own times and which Christ describes as the kind of man who possesses the key to knowledge, but cannot use it and therefore will not allow any one else to use it, even if—in another's hand—it could open the gate to the kingdom of God!

He waged war chiefly against the Philistines. Every child of light has to do the same. Philistinism was the keynote of His age and the community

in which He lived. The Jews of Jerusalem, in Christ's time, are worthy counterparts of the British Philistines of our times, in their clumsy impenetrability, their stupid respectability, their tiresome orthodoxy, their admiration for the idols of the day, their devotion to the exclusive pursuit of coarse, material things, their preposterous self-sufficiency and self-importance. Christ often derided the "whited sepulchres" of respectability and fixed this designation for all time. He treated worldly success as an absolutely negative quantity; He saw nothing in it. He looked upon riches as a drawback to a man. He did not believe that life should be sacrificed to any philosophical or ethical system. He taught that forms and customs existed for the sake of man, not man for the sake of customs and systems. He considered the principles preached by the Sabbatarians futile and useless. With utmost and unrelenting contempt He scourged cold-hearted philanthropy, the showy spectacle of public charity and charitable institutions and those formalities of charity which are so dear to our middle classes.

What we commonly call an orthodox is one who says "Yes" and "Amen" without troubling his mind very much about what he believes; but the

orthodox Jews of old Jerusalem were tyrants, ready to strike down those who differed from them. Christ proved that the spirit, not the creed, was the essential element. He delighted in proving to them that while they were unceasingly reading the law and the prophets, they, in reality, had not the faintest conception of what either meant. In opposition to their fixed humdrum performance of prescribed duties regarding the tithing of each day, Christ taught them how important it was to live for the moment. Those whom He freed from the bondage of their sins, were freed for the sake of the beauty which was in store for them in their lives. When Mary Magdalen saw Christ, she broke the precious cruse of alabaster given her by one of her seven lovers and poured the fragrant ointment over His tired, dust-covered feet; for the sake of this one moment she sits, for all time, in Paradise, with Ruth and Beatrice, under an arbour garlanded with snow-white roses.

Christ softly admonishes and reminds us that every moment is beautiful, that the soul should always be prepared to receive the bridegroom and should always listen for the voice of the lover.

Philistinism is simply that part of man which is not illumined by imagination. Christ considers

all the lovely influences of life degrees of light: imagination itself is the world-light, *τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου;* the world has been created by it, and yet the world cannot grasp it, because imagination is only a revelation of love, and the ability to love distinguishes one creature from another.

Christ is most romantic—in the sense of being most real—when He deals with the sinner. The world had always loved and revered the saint as being on the next highest grade towards the perfection of God. Christ, through His divine instinct, seems to have always loved the sinner as representing the next highest type towards the perfection of man. His chief aim was not to better people, just as little as it was His main endeavour to lessen suffering. He did not strive to transform an interesting thief into a tediously respectable man. He would have thought little of a society for the aid of criminals and similar modern movements. To convert a publican into a Pharisee would not have appealed to Christ as a heroic achievement. But He looked upon sin and suffering as beautiful and sacred in themselves, as steps towards perfection, in a manner which we do not yet understand.

I know fully well this sounds like dangerous

teaching. And it is so. All great ideas are dangerous. Beyond a doubt this was Christ's belief. Of course, the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because he otherwise would not be able to comprehend, to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of consecration. Still more: it is the means by which man may change his past. The Greeks held this to be impossible. In their gnomes and aphorisms they tell us: "Not even the gods can change the past." Christ proved that the commonest sinner is able to do this; that, in fact, it was the only thing he could do. If Christ had been asked, He would, without doubt, have said—I am absolutely sure of it—that the prodigal son, after he had squandered his substance with harlots, herded the rich man's swine, suffered hunger and sighed for the husks which they ate, turned all these acts into beautiful, sacred moments when he fell on his knees and wept.

Most men find it hard to grasp this thought. Perhaps one must have suffered imprisonment to understand it; if so, it pays to have been in prison.

Christ's personality is absolutely unique. There were Christians before Christ, as the break of day is heralded by dim, deceptive rays of light, as the

sun shining suddenly and brightly on wintry days deceives the careful crocus and leads it to spend its gold before its time, as many a foolish bird calls to his mate to build their nest on bare twigs. For this we should be grateful. Unfortunately, there have been no Christians since Christ—with one exception: Francis of Assisi. But to him God had given the soul of a poet, for he had, when he was quite young, in mystical union, chosen poverty as his bride; with the soul of a poet and the body of a beggar he found, without any difficulty, the road to perfection. He understood Christ, and so became like Him. We do not need to be told by the *Liber Conformitatum* that the life of St. Francis was the true *Imitatio Christi;* that his life was a poem compared with which the book of that name is mere prose. Indeed, this is, primarily and ultimately, the charm which emanates from Christ: He completely resembles a perfect work of art. He really does not teach us anything at all; but by coming into His presence, by associating with Him, we become something. And every one is predestined to come into touch with Christ. Once, at least, in his life each one of us walks with Christ on the road to Emmaus. . . .

As to the other theme, "The Life of the Artist

and the Art of Life," one will, no doubt, find it strange that I should select it for my subject. People will point to the prison in Reading and say: "That's the place to which the life of the artist leads." Well, it might lead one to worse places. The Philistines, to whom life is nothing but cunning speculation, whose success depends on a careful calculation of means and ways, know always where to go, and always go there. They start with the ideal aim to become servants of the church, and, no matter to what post they are assigned, they manage to succeed in that capacity, nothing more. A man who works hard to make something out of himself which is not within him—a member of Parliament, a prosperous green-grocer, a prominent lawyer, a judge, or something similar and equally tedious and tiresome—will always see his efforts crowned by success. And that is his punishment.

He who wants a mask must wear it. It is quite different with those in whom the creative force of life is active and becomes manifest. Men whose sole aim is to unfold and develop their ego never know whither the road leads them. The knowledge that the soul of man is fathomless is the acme of wisdom. We ourselves are the arch-secret. Though we may have weighed the sun and measured the

orbit of the moon and marked the places of all the stars in the seven heavens, one thing remains unsolved—ourselves. Who can calculate the orbit of his soul? When the son went out to seek his father's asses, he did not know that a man of God was waiting to anoint him king and that his soul was already the soul of a king. I hope and trust I may live long enough to produce such works of art that I can say at the end of my days: "Now you may see where the life of an artist leads him."

Among the most perfect lives that have come under my observation are the lives of Verlaine and of Prince Krapotkin. Both are men who have experienced prison-life: Verlaine, the only Christian poet since Dante; the other, a man with the soul of that beautiful, white Christ whom Russia is destined to give birth to. During the past seven or eight months, in spite of many great annoyances to which the outside world has subjected me, I have kept in close touch with a new spirit, which has taken possession of men and things within these prison walls, and which has benefited me more than I can express in words. During the first year of my imprisonment, as far as I remember, I did little more than to wring my hands in impotent despair and to cry out: "What end, what terrible end

this is!" Now I try to say to myself, and I do say it, when I do not torment myself, really and sincerely: "What a beginning, what a glorious beginning this is!" May it truly become such. If it ever turns out to be so, I will owe much to this new person who has changed the life of every man in this prison. The things in themselves are of no consequence—let us, for once at least, be grateful to philosophy for something it has taught us: I do not mean its tenets, for they are fashioned according to immutable cast-iron rules, but the spirit which dwells within them. You may be able to understand this if I assure you that had I been freed last May, as I so ardently desired, I would have left this place in disgust and filled with such bitter hatred of all the prison officers that it would have poisoned my life. I had to spend one more year in this place, but, with us all, humanity had entered this prison, and when I am freed I shall always remember the great kindnesses which I have been shown here by all, and on the day of my discharge I shall give thanks to many and ask them, on my own part, not to forget me.

The way prisons are managed is wrong, through and through. I would give a great deal, all, if I could later effect a change. I purpose trying it.

Nothing in the world is so wrong that the spirit of humanity, which is the spirit of love, the spirit of Christ, that is not to be looked for in churches, could not at least make bearable, though one may not be able to set it right.

I further know that many things are waiting for me out there which will fill me with rapture: from that which St. Francis of Assisi calls "my brother, the wind," and "my sister, the water"—both are things of joy—to the show-windows of the shops and the sunsets in big cities. If I should be asked to make a list of all that is still treasured within me, and for me, I would not know how to end it: for, truly, God has created the world for me as much as for any one else.

Perhaps I shall leave here possessed of something I did not know of before. I need not say that an ethical change is, for me, as absurd and preposterous as a religious conversion. While the concocting of plans regarding one's own reform would be a proof of ignorance and hypocrisy, it is the privilege of one who has suffered to gain a deeper insight into one's self. This, I think, I can claim for myself. If, after my release, one of my friends should give a party of some kind and not invite me, it would not affect me in the least. I

can be happy, though I be alone. Who should not be happy if he enjoys liberty, flowers, books and the moon? Besides, feasts are nothing any longer to me. I have given too many myself to find any pleasure or interest in them. This phase of life is behind me—very fortunately, I should like to say. But if, after my release, one of my friends should be afflicted with any care or sorrow, and should refuse to share it with me, this I should resent; if he should, again and again, close his door on me, I would, again and again, beg to be admitted to share what I have a right to. If he should deem me unworthy, unfit to weep with him, I would consider it the most cruel humiliation, the most horrid manner, in which he could inflict disgrace upon me. But this could never happen. I have a supreme right to share suffering with any one; he who can realise the loveliness of the world, share its sorrows and can understand what is so wonderful in both, is in closest touch with the divine and has come as near the understanding of the divine secret as man possibly can.

I hope that there may enter into my art not less than into my life a deeper note, a note of greater unity of all the emotions and greater directness and spontaneity. Intensity, not extensiveness, is the

keynote and goal of modern art. Art is not concerned any longer with the normal, the typical, but with the exceptional. I cannot reproduce my sorrows in the form in which they manifested themselves; art begins where imitation stops. But a new element must be infused into my work, a fuller conception, or words of richer melody, rarer colour effects, more simple architectural structure, and in any case, æsthetic values.

When Marsyas had been pulled "out of the sheath of his limbs"—*dalla vagina delle membra sue*—to use one of Dante's most terrible, Tacitean metaphors, there was an end to his singing, the Greeks tell us. Apollo had become the victor; the shepherd's flute had been vanquished by the lyre. But, maybe, the Greeks are mistaken. I often hear the voice of Marsyas in modern art, bitter in Baudelaire, sweet and plaintive in Lamartine, mysterious in Verlaine. It is in the tardy resolutions of Chopin's music; in the displeasure reflected, again and again, on the faces of Burne-Jones' women. Even Matthew Arnold re-echoes at times the voice of Marysas; it can be heard in the mournful undertone of his verses, which are not free of doubt and anguish, though his poem *Callicles* sings in clear tones of lyric beauty of the "triumph of

the sweet, impressive lyre" and the "famous, final victory," though he followed both Goethe and Wordsworth as his masters. And when he laments the fate of *Thyrsis* or sings about the *Scholar Gipsy* he must needs pipe the lay upon the shepherd's flute. But if Phrygian faun has been silenced, I cannot be. I must express myself by the same innate force by which the blackened branches, which reach over the prison walls and move restlessly in the wind, are impelled to bring forth leaves and blossoms. A wide chasm yawns between my art and the world, but not between art and myself; at least, I hope not. To every one of us a different fate has been allotted: liberty, joy, pleasure, ease. My share is: public disgrace, long imprisonment, misery, bankruptcy, dishonour; yet I am not worthy of it—not yet, at least.

I remember having said that I could appreciate a real tragedy if it approached me in the guise of a noble sorrow and cloaked in purple, but that modern art committed the horrible crime of forcing tragedy to appear in the garb of comedy, so that what was great and noble appeared commonplace, grotesque and without distinction. What I said about this modern dramatic art holds good in real life; it has always been so. It has often been as-

serted that all martyrdom appears vulgar to the spectator. The nineteenth century is no exception to this rule. Everything about my own tragedy has been hideous, vulgar, repulsive, without distinction. Our dress makes us appear grotesque. We are the harlequins of suffering. We are clowns, with broken hearts. It seems to be our special destiny to arouse laughter.

They brought me here from London on the 13th of November, 1895. From two o'clock until half-past two I was forced to stand on the middle platform at Clapham Junction, handcuffed and in the prisoner's garb, exposed to the gaze of the crowd. I had been taken from the prison infirmary, just as I was, without warning. Of all the outcasts, I, no doubt, was the most grotesque to look at. The people laughed when they saw me. Every train that arrived increased the curious crowd of spectators. Their mirth was boundless. This was quite natural, before they knew who I was. But when they learned it they laughed still more. There I stood for half an hour in the grey November rain, surrounded by a howling mob. For a whole year afterward I wept bitterly every day at the same hour. This is not as tragic as it probably sounds to you. To shed tears is part of the daily routine of

those who are behind prison-bars. A day in prison when one does not weep is a day when one's heart grows harder, not a day when one's heart is happy. Now I feel sorry for the people who laughed at me then more than I pity myself. When they saw me I was not on a pedestal, but at the pillory. Wholly unimaginative beings care only for people posing on a pedestal. But a pedestal may be a very unreal thing; the pillory, however, is a horrible reality. Those persons should have interpreted my suffering better. I have said before that behind suffering you still find suffering. It would be more correct to say: behind suffering we always find hidden—a soul. And to deride a soul in anguish is fiendish. The life of any one capable of doing this is devoid of beauty. In the strangely simple economy of the world one receives only that which one gives. Can one have any other feeling than contempt for those who possess not enough power of imagination to penetrate the shell of things and to sympathise with their fellows?

I describe this experience on my way to prison only so that you may clearly see how difficult it was for me to derive from my punishment any other feeling than that of embitterment and hatred. Yet I must try to overcome these feelings, and now and

then I have moments of resignation and submission. In a single bud the whole spring may be hidden, and the nest of the lark in the furrows of the field may contain all the joy which will herald the approach of many a glorious sunrise. It may be that all the beauty which life holds in store for me is contained potentially in one moment of submission, humiliation and humility. However this may be, I can only progress along the line of the development of my true self and show myself worthy of all that happened to me by accepting it humbly and without a murmur.

They used to say of me that I had too much individualism; that I was too self-centred. I must have become still more so. I must, in future, much more than I ever did, draw from my inner self and ask and accept less from the world. My crime was, in reality, not the consequence of too great an individualism, but rather because I did not possess enough individuality. The one shameful, unpardonable and, for all time, contemptible act of my life was in asking society for help and protection.

It was bad enough—from an individualistic point of view—to seek such protection; but what excuse can ever be adduced in my favour? As soon

as I had set in motion the machinery of society, it naturally turned against me and said: "You have all this time lived in violation of my laws and now you claim their protection? You will have to feel their full severity. You must suffer the consequences of your conduct." The result is that I am here in prison. During the course of three trials I have felt keenly the irony and disgrace of my position.

Surely, never before was a man ruined so shamefully and by such shameful means as I was. I said somewhere in *Dorian Gray:* "One cannot be too careful in the choice of one's enemies." I never dreamed that I should some day become a pariah through pariahs. This is the reason that I despise myself.

Incapacity to understand art does not make a man a Philistine. Interesting people, for instance, fishermen, shepherds, ploughmen, farmers and the like, know nothing of art, and yet they are the salt of the earth. He is a genuine Philistine who aids and abets the clumsy, burdensome, blind, mechanical forces of society without recognising, even if it crosses his path, the dynamic force in a man or a movement. One has blamed me terribly because I invited vicious, depraved, human parasites

to my table and that I found pleasure in their company. Yet looking at them from the viewpoint of an artist, from which I approached them, they were to me like highly exciting stimulants. It was as if one caroused with panthers. I felt like a snake-charmer when he tries to make the cobra rise from the motley cloth or the wicker-basket and wave her hood in the air, like a plant swaying in a flowing stream. They were, to my mind, the most glittering of all the gilded snakes, and their poison was but a part of their perfect organism, and they were highly interesting. What I am ashamed of is the horrid Philistine atmosphere into which I was dragged. My place as an artist was at the side of Ariel; I lowered myself to wrestle with Caliban. Instead of writing, in beautiful and musical language, works like *Salome,* the *Florentine Tragedy* and *La Sainte Courtisane,* I felt obliged to concoct and send out long-winded letters, stuffed with legal lore. I seemed impelled to seek protection from a system I had ever shunned, a system noted for its infamous warfare against life. The elder Dumas, Cellini, Goya, Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire, would have done exactly the same. . . .

A good friend of mine, of ten years' standing,

visited me not long ago and assured me that he did not believe a single word of all they had laid against me; he gave me to understand that he was convinced of my innocence, and that I was the victim of a base conspiracy. I burst in tears when he spoke thus to me, and told him that, indeed, much I was accused of was absolutely untrue and had maliciously been charged against me, but that, on the other hand, my life had been full of perverse pleasures and strange passions. I added that unless he looked this fact squarely in the face and accepted it and became reconciled to it I could not continue being his friend or would ever again care for his society. It was a terrible blow for him; but we are still friends, and I have not retained his friendship by false pretences. To speak the truth may be painful, but to be forced to lie is worse.

During my last trial, as I sat on the criminal's bench listening to Lockwood's crushing accusation, his speech sounded like a terse passage from Tacitus, a verse of Dante, one of Savonarola's fiery philippics against the popes. I felt disgusted with what I had to listen to. Suddenly the thought came to me: "How grand this would sound if I said all this about my own self!" And there it dawned upon me that what is said matters nothing;

that everything depends on who says it. The supreme moment of a man's life—of this I have not the slightest doubt—is the moment when he kneels down in the dust, strikes his breast and makes a full confession of all his sins.

The strength of our sensations, our feelings—as I say in *Intentions*—is as limited in its extent and duration as the manifestations of physical energy. The small cup, which is to contain a certain amount, can hold just so much and no more, though all the casks of Burgundy be filled to the brim with purple wine, and the wine-treaders stand up to their knees in grapes grown on the sunny, stony hills of Spain. No error has so widely spread as the belief that people who cause or occasion great tragedies share the feelings aroused in others by the tragic situation; to expect this from them is a fatal error. The martyr, perhaps, in his "garment of flame," sees the face of God, but to him who piles up the faggots or pokes the burning pile so that the wind may fan the fire to greater fury the whole scene means no more than the killing of an ox means to the butcher, the cutting of a tree to the charcoal-burner in the forest, or to the mower when his scythe kills a flower blooming in the grass. Great emotions are

only for great souls, and great events can be appreciated only by those who can rise to their height.

Looked at from the viewpoint of an artist, I know of nothing more incomparable, more stimulating and subtly suggestive than the manner in which Shakespeare portrays Rosencrans and Guildenstern. They are Hamlet's university friends; they have been his companions. They bring with them the memory of happy days. They meet Hamlet when he is staggering under the weight of a task unbearable to a man of his disposition. His dead father has risen, armed, from the grave to tax him with a mission too great, and, at the same time, beneath him. Hamlet is a dreamer and he is called upon to act! He has the temperament of a poet, and he is asked to link together, in the common fashion, cause and effect, to wrestle with practical life, of which he is ignorant, not with life in its ideal aspect, with which he is familiar. He cannot reach a decision, and his madness consists in feigning madness.

Brutus uses madness as a cloak to hide beneath it the sword of his purpose, the dagger of his resolution; Hamlet's madness is only as a mask for his weakness, his indecision. He puts off action by playing a part and making witty speeches. He

constantly toys with it, as an artist does with a theory. He watches his own strange antics and listens to his own discourses, though he knows they are only "words, words, words." Instead of trying to be the hero of his own history, he endeavours to become the spectator of his own tragedy. He believes in nothing, himself included, and yet his doubts avail him nothing since they do not spring from philosophical scepticism, but from a will at war with itself. Of all this, Guildenstern and Rosencrans understand nothing. They bow and smirk and smile, and what one says the other echoes. When Hamlet, at last, catches the "conscience of the king" by the fancied story of the play within the play, and causes him to leave his throne in terror, Guildenstern and Rosencrans see in his conduct, at the most, a rather painful breach of court etiquette. So far and no farther can they "view the spectacle of life through the medium of their emotions." They are after his secret, but can never learn it. Nor would it be of any use to reveal it to them. They are the small cups which can contain just so much and no more.

Towards the end of the play we are led to surmise that, involved in the rascally scheme of the king to rid himself of Hamlet, they meet—or are

to meet—a sudden, violent death. But fellows of their calibre are not worthy of such a tragic end. They never die. Horatio, who

"Absents himself from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draws his breath in pain,"

in order to defend Hamlet and his cause—Horatio dies, though not before the eyes of the spectators, and leaves no brother behind. But Guildenstern and Rosencrans are as immortal as Angelo and Tartuffe, and should take equal rank with them. They constitute the contribution of modern life to the ancient ideal of friendship. He who, in future, attempts to write a new *De Amicitia,* must assign to them a niche and praise them in Ciceronian prose. They are fixed types for all time to come. To abuse them would show a lack of due appreciation. They simply do not grasp that which is beyond their horizon. That is all. Greatness of soul is not contagious. Sublime thoughts and sublime feelings are, by their very nature, isolated and stand, as it were, alone.

* * * * * * * *

If everything goes well, I shall be a free man by the end of May and then I expect to go at once,

with Robbie and More, . . . to some foreign village by the sea. Euripides says in *Iphigenia* that the sea washes away the stains and cleanses the wounds of the world.

I hope to pass at least a month with my friends, and to gain, in their wholesome, loving companionship, peace and equanimity; I hope that my heart may then feel less oppressed and my mood be more softened. I feel a strange longing for the primitive elements—the ocean, which is as much a mother to me as the earth. It seems to me that we contemplate Nature too much, and live too little with her. The attitude of the Greeks appears to me more sane and reasonable. They did not rave sentimentally about sunsets, nor did they discuss the question whether the shadows on the grass were really violet or not. But they knew that the sea was meant for the swimmer and the sand on the shore for the feet of the runner. They loved the trees for their shade and the forests for the silence which permeates them at noon. The vintager placed a wreath of ivy on his head to ward off the rays of the sun when he bent low over the young, sprouting vine, and for the artist and the athlete—the two types which we owe to Hellas—they wound into

wreaths the leaves of the bitter laurel and of the wild parsley, which were of no other use to men.

We pride ourselves that we live in a utilitarian age and we don't know the proper use of anything. We have forgotten that water can cleanse, that fire can purify and that the earth is the mother of us all. Accordingly, our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and concerns itself with the things themselves.

I am convinced that the elements possess a healing, purifying power, and I will return to them and live in their company. For one, who is so modern as I am, so much an "enfant de mon siècle," the mere sight of the world will always be a joy. I tremble with joyful anticipation when I think that on the day when I shall leave this prison the laburnum and the lilac will be in bloom, and that I shall see how the wind shakes unceasingly the hanging gold flowers of the former and the pale-purple blossoms of the latter, so that the air will be filled with fragrance sweeter than the perfumes of Arabia. Linnæus went down on his knees and cried with joy when he saw, for the first time, the wide-stretching expanse of an English heath, yellow with the sweet-smelling broom-plant, and I, who love flowers, as a mother loves children,

know that tears are waiting for me in the petals of a rose. I have always felt this emotion since my early youth. There is no colour hiding in the chalice of a flower, or in the hollow of a shell, which does not touch a chord in my soul that responds in tender sympathy to the soul of all created things. Like Gautier, I have always been one of those "pour qui le monde visible existe." Yet now I know that behind all this beauty, however convincing it may be, there is hidden a spirit of which all things tangible and visible are mere projections, and it is with this spirit that I wish to come into harmonious touch. I am weary of men and things which we can easily perceive with our crude senses. The mystic element in art, the mystical in life, the mystical in Nature—that is what my soul is hungry for, and in the great musical symphonies, in the hallowed suffering of the human heart and in the depths of the ocean I may find it, for it is absolutely necessary that I find it somewhere.

All trials are trials for life, just as all sentences are death-sentences. I have faced the judge three times. The first time when from an accuser I became the accused and was arrested; the second time, to be led back to jail and held for trial; the third time, to be sentenced to two years' imprison-

ment. Society, as it is constituted at present, will have no place for me, can offer none. But Nature, who pours her beneficent rain alike upon the just and the unjust, will offer me some hiding in the fastness of the mountains, or the seclusion of silent valleys, where I may weep undisturbed. She will illumine the night with stars that I may, without stumbling, find my way in the dark and into exile; let the wind efface all traces of my footprints so that no one can follow or harm me; she will cleanse me with her mighty waters and heal my wounds with her bitter herbs

Supplementary Letters.

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS.

JANUARY 6TH, 1896.

MY DEAR ROBBIE,

Consider now, my dear Robbie, my proposal. I think my wife, who in money matters is most honourable and high-minded, will refund the £75 paid for my share. I have no doubt she will. But I think it should be offered from me, and that I should not accept anything in the way of income from her; I can accept what is given in love and affection to me, but I could not accept what is doled out grudgingly or with conditions. I would sooner let my wife be quite free. She may marry again. In any case I think that if free she would allow me to see my children from time to time. That is what I want. But I must set her free first, and had better do it as a gentleman by bowing my head and accepting everything. You must consider the whole question, as it is through you and your ill-advised action it is due: and let me know what you and others think. Of course you acted for the best.

But you were wrong in your view. I may say candidly that I am getting gradually to a state of mind when I think that everything that happens is for the best. This may be philosophy, or a broken heart, or religion, or the dull apathy of despair. But, whatever its origin, the feeling is strong with me. To tie my wife to me against her will would be wrong. She has a full right to her freedom. And not to be supported by her would be a pleasure to me. It is an ignominious position to be a pensioner on her. Talk over this with More Adey. Get him to show you the letter I have written to him. Ask your brother Aleck to give me his advice. He has excellent wisdom on things.

Now to other points.

I have never had the chance of thanking you for the books. They were most welcome. Not being allowed the magazines was a blow, but Meredith's novel charmed me. What a sane artist in temper! He is quite right in his assertion of sanity as the essential in romance. Still, up to the present only the abnormal have found expression in life and literature. Rossetti's letters are dreadful, obviously forgeries by his brother. I was interested, however, to see how my granduncle's *Melmoth,* and my mother's *Sidonia* have been

two of the books that fascinated his youth. As regards the conspiracy against him in later years, I believe it really existed, and that the funds for it came out of Hake's Bank. The conduct of a thrush in Cheyne Walk seems to be most suspicious, though William Rossetti says: "I could discern nothing in the thrush's song at all out of the common." Stevenson's letters are most disappointing also—I see that romantic surroundings are the worst surroundings possible for a romantic writer. In Gower Street, Stevenson could have written a new *Trois Mousquetaires*. In Samoa he wrote letters to *The Times* about Germans. I see also the traces of a terrible strain to lead a natural life. To chop wood with any advantage to oneself, or profit to others, one should not be able to describe the process. In point of fact the natural life is the unconscious life. Stevenson merely extended the sphere of the artificial by taking to digging. The whole dreary book has given me a lesson. If I spend my future life reading Baudelaire in a café I shall be leading a more natural life than if I take to hedger's work or plant cacao in mud-swamps. *En Route* is most overrated. It is sheer journalism. It never makes one hear a note of the music it describes. The subject

is delightful, but the style is, of course, worthless, slipshod, flaccid. It is worse French than Ohnet's. Ohnet tries to be commonplace and succeeds. Huysman tries not to be, and is. . . . Hardy's novel is pleasant, and Harold Frederic's very interesting in matter. . . . Later on, there being hardly any novels in the prison library for the poor imprisoned fellows I live with, I think of presenting the Library with about a dozen good novels: Stevenson's (none here but *The Black Arrow*), some of Thackeray's (none here), Jane Austen (none here), and some good Dumas-père-like books, by Stanley Weyman, for instance, and any modern young man. You mentioned Henley had a protégé? Also the Anthony Hope man. After Easter you might make out a list of about fourteen and apply to let me have them. They would please the few who do not care about De Goncourt's journal. Don't forget I would pay myself for them. I have a horror myself of going out into a world without a single book of my own. I wonder would there be any of my friends, such as Cosmo Lennox, Reggie Turner, Gilbert Burgess, Max, and the like, who would give me a few books. You know the sort of books I want: Flaubert, Stevenson, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck, Dumas père, Keats,

Marlowe, Chatterton, Coleridge, Anatole France, Gautier, Dante and all Dante literature; Goethe and Goethe literature, and so on. I would feel it a great compliment to have books waiting for me—and perhaps there may be some friends who would like to be kind to me. One is really very grateful, though I fear I often seem not to be. But then remember I have had incessant worries besides prison-life.

In answer to this you can send me a long letter all about plays and books. Your handwriting, in your last, was so dreadful that it looked as if you were writing a three-volume novel on the terrible spread of communistic ideas among the rich, or in some other way wasting a youth that always has been, and always will remain, quite full of promise. If I wrong you in ascribing it to such a cause, you must make allowances for the morbidity produced by long imprisonment. But do write clearly. Otherwise it looks as if you had something to conceal.

There is much that is horrid, I suppose, in this letter. But I had to blame you to yourself, not to others. Read my letter to More. Harris comes to see me on Saturday, I hope. Remember me to Arthur Clifton and his wife, who, I find, is so like

Rossetti's wife—the same lovely hair—but of course a sweeter nature, though Miss Siddal is fascinating and her poem A1.

Yours ever,

OSCAR.

10th March, 1896.

My dear Robbie,

I want you to have a letter written at once to Mr. ——, the solicitor, stating that as my wife has promised to settle a third on me, in the case of her predeceasing me, I do not wish any opposition to be made to her purchasing my life interest. I feel that I have brought such unhappiness on her and such ruin on my children that I have no right to go against her wishes in anything. She was gentle and good to me here, when she came to see me. I have full trust in her. Please have this done at once, and thank my friends for their kindnesses. I feel I am acting rightly leaving this to my wife.

Please write to Stuart Merrill in Paris, or Robert Sherard, to say how gratified I was at the performance of my play, and have my thanks conveyed to Lugne-Pöe; it is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should be still regarded as an artist: I wish I could feel more pleasure, but I seem dead to all emotion except those of anguish and despair. However, please let Lugne-Pöe know that I am sensible of the honour he has done me.

He is a poet himself. I fear you will find it difficult to read this, but as I am not allowed writing materials I seem to have forgotten how to write—you must excuse me. Thank More for exerting himself for books for me; unluckily I suffer from headaches when I read my Greek and Roman poets—so they have not been of much use—but his kindness was great in getting the set. Ask him to express my gratitude to the lady who lives at Wimbledon. Write to me, please, in answer to this and tell me about literature, what new books, etc.,—also Jones' play and Forbes-Robertson's management—about any new tendency in the stage of Paris or London. Also try and see what Lemaître, Bauer, and Sarcey said of *Salome,* and give me a little résumé: please write to Henri and say I am touched at his writing nicely. Robert Sherard knows him. It was sweet of you to come and see me. You must come again next time. Here I have the horror of death with the still greater horror of living, and in silence and misery. . . .

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

I always remember you with deep affection.

I wish Ernest would get from Oakley Street my portmanteau, fur-coat, clothes, and the books of

my own writing which I gave my dear mother—ask —— in whose name the burial ground of my mother was taken.

Always your friend,

Oscar Wilde.

April 1st, 1897.

My dear Robbie,

I send you a MS. separate from this, which I hope will arrive safely. As soon as you have read it, I want you to have it carefully copied for me. There are many causes why I wish this to be done. One will suffice. I want you to be my literary executor in case of my death, and to have complete control of my plays, books, and papers. As soon as I find I have a legal right to make a will, I will do so. My wife does not understand my art, nor could be expected to have any interest in it, and Cyril is only a child. So I turn naturally to you, as indeed I do for everything, and would like you to have all my works. The deficit that their sale will produce may be lodged to the credit of Cyril and Vivian. Well, if you are my literary executor, you must be in possession of the only document that gives any explanation of my extraordinary behaviour. . . . When you have read the letter, you will see the psychological explanation of a course of conduct that from the outside seems a combination of absolute idiocy with vulgar

bravado. Some day the truth will have to be known—not necessarily in my lifetime . . . but I am not prepared to sit in the grotesque pillory they put me into, for all time; for the simple reason that I inherited from my father and mother a name of high distinction of literature and art, and I cannot for eternity allow that name to be degraded. . . . I don't defend my conduct. I explain it. Also there are in my letter certain passages which deal with my mental development in prison, and the inevitable evolution of my character and intellectual attitude towards life that has taken place: and I want you and others who still stand by me and have affection for me to know exactly in what mood and manner I hope to face the world. Of course from one point of view I know that on the day of my release I shall be merely passing from one prison into another, and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell and as full of terror for me. Still I believe that at the beginning God made a world for each separate man, and in that world which is within us one should seek to live. At any rate you will read those parts of my letter with less pain than the others. Of course I need not remind you how fluid a thing thought is with me—with us

all—and of what an evanescent substance are our emotions made. Still, I do see a sort of possible goal towards which, through art, I may progress. It is not unlikely that you may help me.

As regards the mode of copying: of course it is too long for any amanuensis to attempt: and your own handwriting, dear Robbie, in your last letter, seems specially designed to remind me that the task is not to be yours. . . . I think that the only thing to do is to be thoroughly modern and to have it typewritten. Of course, the MSS. should not pass out of your control, but could you not get Mrs. Marshall to send down one of her typewriting girls—women are the most reliable as they have no memory for the important—to Hornton Street or Phillimore Gardens, to do it under your supervision? I assure you that the typewriting machine, when played with expression, is not more annoying than the piano when played by a sister or near relation. Indeed, many among those most devoted to domesticity prefer it. I wish the copy to be done not on tissue paper but on good paper such as is used for plays, and a wide rubricated margin should be left for corrections. . . . If the copy is done at Hornton Street the lady typewriter might be fed through a lattice in the

door, like the Cardinals when they elect a Pope; till she comes out on the balcony and can say to the world: "Habet Mundus Epistolam," for indeed it is an Encyclical letter, and as the Bulls of the Holy Father are named from their opening words, it may be spoken of as the "Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis." . . . In point of fact, Robbie, prison life makes one see people and things as they really are. That is why it turns one to stone. It is the people outside who are deceived by the illusions of a life in constant motion. They revolve with life and contribute to its unreality. We who are immobile both see and know. Whether or not the letter does good to narrow natures and hectic brains, to me it has done good. I have "cleansed my bosom of much perilous stuff"; to borrow a phrase from the poet whom you and I once thought of rescuing from the Philistines. I need not remind you the mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life. It is by utterance that we live. Of the many, many things for which I have to thank the Governor there is none for which I am more grateful than for his permission to write fully and at as great a length as I desire. For nearly two years I had within a growing burden of bitterness, much of which I have now got

rid of. On the other side of the prison wall there are some poor black soot-besmirched trees that are just breaking out into buds of an almost shrill green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression.

Ever yours,

OSCAR.

H. M. Prison, Reading.

. . . To these purely business matters perhaps More Adey will kindly reply. His letter dealing purely with business, I shall be allowed to receive. It will not, I mean, interfere with your literary letter with regard to which the Governor has just now read me your kind message.

For myself, my dear Robbie, I have little to say that can please you. The refusal to commute my sentence has been like a blow from a leaden sword. I am dazed with a dull sense of pain. I had fed on hope, and now anguish, grown hungry, feeds her fill on me as though she had been starved of her proper appetite. There are, however, kinder elements in this evil prison air than before: sympathies have been shown to me, and I no longer feel entirely isolated from humane influences, which was before a source of terror and trouble to me. And I read Dante, and make excerpts and notes for the pleasure of using a pen and ink. And it seems as if I were better in many ways, and I am going to take up the study of German. Indeed,

prison seems to be the proper place for such a study. There is a thorn, however—as bitter as that of St. Paul, though different—that I must pluck out of my flesh in this letter. It is caused by a message you wrote on a piece of paper for me to see. I feel that if I kept it secret it might grow in my mind (as poisonous things grow in the dark) and take its place with other terrible thoughts that gnaw me. . . . Thought, to those that sit alone and silent and in bonds, being no "winged living thing," as Plato feigned it, but a thing dead, breeding what is horrible like a slime that shows monsters to the moon.

I mean, of course, what you said about the sympathies of others being estranged from me, or in danger of being so, by the deep bitterness of my feelings: and I believe that my letter was lent and shown to others. . . . Now, I don't like my letters shown about as curiosities: it is most distasteful to me. I write to you freely as to one of the dearest friends I have, or have ever had: and, with a few exceptions, the sympathy of others touches me, as far as its loss goes, very little. No man of my position can fall into the mire of life without getting a great deal of pity from his inferiors; and I know that when plays last too long

spectators tire. My tragedy has lasted far too long; its climax is over; its end is mean; and I am quite conscious of the fact that when the end does come I shall return an unwelcome visitant to a world that does not want me. *A revenant,* as the French say, as one whose face is grey with long imprisonment and crooked with pain. Horrible as are the dead when they rise from their tombs, the living who come out from tombs are more horrible still. Of all this I am only too conscious. When one has been for eighteen terrible months in a prison cell, one sees things and people as they really are. The sight turns one to stone. Do not think that I would blame any one for my vices. My friends had as little to do with them as I had with theirs. Nature was in this matter a stepmother to all of us. I blame them for not appreciating the man they ruined. As long as my table was red with wine and roses, what did they care? My genius, my life as an artist, my work, and the quiet I needed for it, were nothing to them. . . . I admit I lost my head. . . . I was bewildered, incapable of judgment. I made the one fatal step. And now . . . I sit here on a bench in a prison cell. In all tragedies there is a grotesque element. You know the grotesque element in mine. Do not

think I do not blame myself. I curse myself night and day for my folly in allowing something to dominate my life. If there was an echo in these walls, it would cry "Fool" for ever. I am utterly ashamed of my friendships. . . . For by their friendships men can be judged. It is a test of every man. And I feel poignant abasement of shame for my friendships . . . of which you may read a full account in my trial.

It is to me a daily source of mental humiliation. Of some of them I never think. They trouble me not. It is of no importance. . . . Indeed my entire tragedy seems to be grotesque and nothing else. For as a result of my having suffered myself to be thrust into a trap . . . and I sit in the lowest mire of Malebolge, between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. In certain places no one, except those actually insane, is allowed to laugh: and indeed, even in their case, it is against the regulations for conduct: otherwise I think I would laugh at that. . . . For the rest, do not let any one suppose that I am crediting others with unworthy motives. They really had no motives in life at all. Motives are intellectual things. They had passions merely, and such passions are False Gods that will have victims at all costs, and in the

present case have had one wreathed with bay. Now I have plucked the thorn out—that little scrawled line of yours rankled terribly. I now think merely of your getting quite well again, and writing at last the wonderful story of ——. Pray remember me to your dear mother, and also to Aleck. The "gilded sphinx" is, I suppose, wonderful as ever. And send from me all that in my thoughts and feelings is good, and whatever of remembrance and reverence she will accept, to the lady of Wimbledon, whose soul is a sanctuary for those who are wounded and a house of refuge for those in pain. Do not show this letter to others, nor discuss what I have written in your answer. Tell me about that world of shadows I loved so much. And about the life and the soul tell me also. I am curious of the things that stung me; and in my pain there is pity.

Yours,

OSCAR.

The Soul of Man Under Socialism.

THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER SOCIALISM.

The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely any one at all escapes.

Now and then, in the course of the century, a great man of science, like Darwin; a great poet, like Keats; a fine critical spirit, like M. Renan; a supreme artist, like Flaubert, has been able to isolate himself, to keep himself out of reach of the clamorous claims of others, to stand "under the shelter of the wall," as Plato puts it, and so to realise the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world. These, however, are exceptions. The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism—are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by

hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man's intelligence; and, as I pointed out some time ago in an article on the function of criticism, it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease.

They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.

But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. *The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.* And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim. Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, so, in the present state of things in England, the

people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good; and at last we have had the spectacle of men who have really studied the problem and know the life—educated men who live in the East End—coming forward and imploring the community to restrain its altruistic impulses of charity, benevolence, and the like. They do so on the ground that such charity degrades and demoralises. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.

There is also this to be said. It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair.

Under Socialism all this will, of course, be altered. There will be no people living in fetid dens and fetid rags, and bringing up unhealthy, hunger-pinched children in the midst of impossible and absolutely repulsive surroundings. The security of society will not depend, as it does now, on the state of the weather. If a frost comes we shall not have a hundred thousand men out of work, tramping about the streets in a state of disgusting misery, or whining to their neighbours for alms, or crowding round the doors of loathsome shelters to try and secure a hunch of bread and a night's un-

clean lodging. Each member of the society will share in the general prosperity and happiness of the society, and if a frost comes no one will practically be anything the worse.

Upon the other hand, *Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism.*

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first. At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that

is really congenial to them and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture—in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation. Upon the other hand, there are a great many people who, having no private property of their own, and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want. These are the poor, and amongst them there is no grace of manner, or charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life. From their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity. But it is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.

Of course, it might be said that the Individualism generated under conditions of private property is not always, or even as a rule, of a fine or wonderful type, and that the poor, if they have not cul-

ture and charm, have still many virtues. Both these statements would be quite true. The possession of private property is very often extremely demoralising, and that is, of course, one of the reasons why Socialism wants to get rid of the institution. In fact, property is really a nuisance. Some years ago people went about the country saying that property has duties. They said it so often and so tediously that, at last, the Church has begun to say it. One hears it now from every pulpit. It is perfectly true. Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply pleasures, we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable. In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it. The virtues of the poor may be readily admitted, and are much to be regretted. We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, *but the best amongst the poor are never grateful.* They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent at-

tempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it. As for being discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country labourer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly-fed animal. He should decline to live like that, and should either steal or go on the rates, which is considered by many to be a form of stealing. As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to take than to beg. No; a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor, one

can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under these conditions to realise some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance.

However, the explanation is not really so difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them. What is said by great employers of labour against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state,

there would be no advance towards civilisation. Slavery was put down in America, not in consequence of any action on the part of the slaves, or even any express desire on their part that they should be free. It was put down entirely through the grossly illegal conduct of certain agitators in Boston and elsewhere, who were not slaves themselves, nor owners of slaves, nor had anything to do with the question really. It was, undoubtedly, the Abolitionists who set the torch alight, who began the whole thing. And it is curious to note that from the slaves themselves they received, not merely very little assistance, but hardly any sympathy even; and when at the close of the war the slaves found themselves free, found themselves indeed so absolutely free that they were free to starve, many of them bitterly regretted the new state of things. To the thinker, the most tragic fact in the whole of the French Revolution is not that Marie Antoinette was killed for being a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendée voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism.

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness,

under an industrial barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.

I hardly think that any Socialist, nowadays, would seriously propose that an inspector should call every morning at each house to see that each citizen rose up and did manual labour for eight hours. Humanity has got beyond that stage, and reserves such a form of life for the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, it chooses to call criminals. But I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. *It is only in voluntary associations that man is fine.*

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the existence of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such private property. The answer is very simple. It is true that, under existing conditions, a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realise their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage. The question is whether it would be for the good of Individualism that such an advantage should be taken away. Let us suppose that it is taken away. What happens then to Individualism? How will it benefit?

It will benefit in this way. Under the new conditions Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively-realised Individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what

he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain not growth its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. *The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.* Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community from being individual by putting them on the wrong road and encumbering them. Indeed, so completely has man's personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man's property with far more severity than offences against his person, and property is still the test of complete citizenship. The industry necessary for the making of money is also very demoralising. In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or per-

haps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him—in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living. He is also, under existing conditions, very insecure. An enormously wealthy merchant may be—often is—at every moment of his life at the mercy of things that are not under his control. If the wind blows an extra point or so, or the weather suddenly changes, or some trivial thing happens, his ship may go down, his speculations may go wrong, and he finds himself a poor man, with his social position quite gone. Now, nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has, is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live

is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.

It is a question whether we have ever seen the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art. In action, we never have. Cæsar, says Mommsen, was the complete and perfect man. But how tragically insecure was Cæsar! Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority. Cæsar was very perfect, but his perfection travelled by too dangerous a road. Marcus Aurelius was the perfect man, says Renan. Yes; the great emperor was a perfect man. But how intolerable were the endless claims upon him! He staggered under the burden of the empire. He was conscious how inadequate one man was to bear the weight of that Titan and too vast orb. What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect conditions; one who is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger. *Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction.* Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity, and hypocrisy, and Philistinism of the English. Such battles do not always intensify strength: they often exaggerate weakness. Byron was never able to give

us what he might have given us. Shelley escaped better. Like Byron, he got out of England as soon as possible. But he was not so well known. If the English had had any idea of what a great poet he really was, they would have fallen on him with tooth and nail, and made his life as unbearable to him as they possibly could. But he was not a remarkable figure in society, and consequently he escaped, to a certain degree. Still, even in Shelley the note of rebellion is sometimes too strong. The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace.

It will be a marvellous thing—the true personality of man—when we see it. It will grow naturally and simply, flower-like, or as a tree grows. It will not be at discord. It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge. It will have wisdom. Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not be always meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet, while it will not meddle with others, it will help all,

as a beautiful thing helps us by being what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.

In its development it will be assisted by Christianity, if men desire that; but if men do not desire that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one.

"Know Thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be Thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be Thyself." That is the secret of Christ.

When Jesus talks about the poor He simply means personalities, just as when He talks about the rich He simply means people who have not developed their personalities. Jesus moved in a community that allowed the accumulation of private property just as our does, and the gospel that He preached was not that in such a community it is an advantage for a man to live on scanty, unwholesome food, to wear ragged, unwholesome clothes, to

sleep in horrid, unwholesome dwellings, and a disadvantage for a man to live under healthy, pleasant, and decent conditions. Such a view would have been wrong there and then, and would, of course, be still more wrong now and in England; for as man moves northwards the material necessities of life become of more vital importance, and our society is infinitely more complex, and displays far greater extremes of luxury and pauperism than any society of the antique world. What Jesus meant was this. He said to man, "You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself. Don't imagine that your perfection lies in accumulating or possessing external things. Your perfection is inside of you. If only you could realise that, you would not want to be rich. Ordinary riches can be stolen from a man. Real riches cannot. In the treasury-house of your soul there are infinitely precious things, that may not be taken from you. And so, try to so shape your life that external things will not harm you. And try also to get rid of personal property. It involves sordid preoccupation, endless industry, continual wrong. Personal property hinders Individualism at every step." It is to be noted that Jesus never says that impoverished people are necessarily good, or

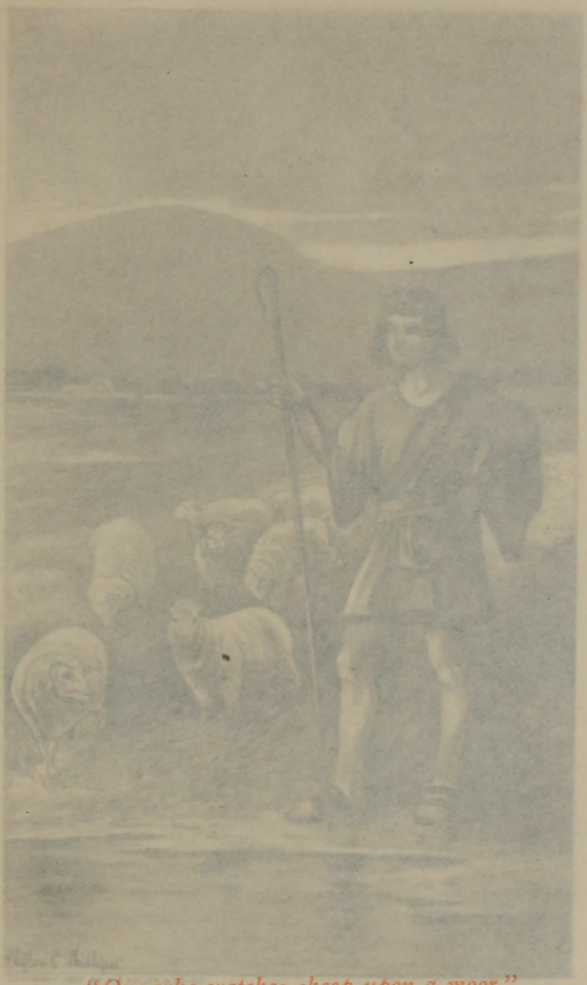
wealthy people necessarily bad. That would not have been true. Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral, more intellectual, more well-behaved. *There is only one class in the community that thinks more about money than the rich, and that is the poor.* The poor can think of nothing else. That is the misery of being poor. What Jesus does say is that man reaches his perfection, not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is. And so the wealthy young man who comes to Jesus is represented as a thoroughly good citizen, who has broken none of the laws of his state, none of the commandments of his religion. He is quite respectable, in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word. Jesus says to him, "You should give up private property. It hinders you from realising your perfection. It is a drag upon you. It is a burden. Your personality does not need it. It is within you, and not outside of you, that you will find what you really are, and what you really want." To His own friends He says the same thing. He tells them to be themselves, and not to be always worrying about other things. What do other things matter? Man is complete in himself. When they go into the world,

the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world hates Individualism. But this is not to trouble them. They are to be calm and self-centred. If a man takes their cloak, they are to give him their coat, just to show that material things are of no importance. If people abuse them, they are not to answer back. What does it signify? The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. Even if people employ actual violence, they are not to be violent in turn. That would be to fall to the same low level. After all, even in prison, a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace. And, above all things, they are not to interfere with other people or judge them in any way. Personality is a very mysterious thing. A man cannot always be estimated by what he does. He may keep the law, and yet be worthless. He may break the law, and yet be fine. He may be bad, without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through that sin his true perfection.

There was a woman who was taken in adultery. We are not told the history of her love, but that love must have been very great; for Jesus said that

her sins were forgiven her, not because she repented, but because her love was so intense and wonderful. Later on, a short time before His death, as He sat at a feast, the woman came in and poured costly perfumes on His hair. His friends tried to interfere with her, and said that it was an extravagance, and that the money that the perfume cost should have been expended on charitable relief of people in want, or something of that kind. Jesus did not accept that view. He pointed out that the material needs of Man were great and very permanent, but that the spiritual needs of Man were greater still, and that in one divine moment, and by selecting its own mode of expression, a personality might make itself perfect. The world worships the woman, even now, as a saint.

Yes; there are suggestive things in Individualism. Socialism annihilates family life, for instance. With the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear. This is part of the programme. Individualism accepts this and makes it fine. It converts the abolition of legal restraint into a form of freedom that will help the full development of personality, and make the love of man and woman more wonderful, more beautiful, and more ennobling. Jesus knew this.



"One who watches sheep upon a moor."

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He rejected the claims of family life, although they existed in His day and community in a very marked form. "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He said, when He was told that they wished to speak to Him. When one of His followers asked leave to go and bury his father, "Let the dead bury the dead," was His terrible answer. He would allow no claim whatsoever to be made on personality.

And so he who would lead a Christ-like life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself. He may be a great poet, or a great man of science; or a young student at a University, or one who watches sheep upon a moor; or a maker of dramas, like Shakespeare, or a thinker about God, like Spinoza; or a child who plays in a garden, or a fisherman who throws his nets into the sea. It does not matter what he is, as long as he realises the perfection of the soul that is within him. All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. Through the streets of Jerusalem at the present day crawls one who is mad and carries a wooden cross on his shoulders. He is a symbol of the lives that are marred by imitation. Father Damien was Christ-like when he went out to live with the lepers, because in such service he realised fully what was best

in him. But he was not more Christ-like than Wagner, when he realised his soul in music; or than Shelley, when he realised his soul in song. There is no one type for man. There are as many perfections as there are imperfect men. And while to the claims of charity a man may yield and yet be free, to the claims of conformity no man may yield and remain free at all.

Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to attain to. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a wise man once said many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind. *All modes of government are failures.* Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time, for all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised. When it is violently, grossly, and

cruelly used, it produces a good effect, by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the spirit of revolt and individualism that is to kill it. When it is used with a certain amount of kindness, and accompanied by prizes and rewards, it is dreadfully demoralising. People, in that case, are less conscious of the horrible pressure that is being put on them, and so go through their lives in a sort of coarse comfort, like petted animals, without ever realising that they are probably thinking other people's thoughts, living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one may call other people's second-hand clothes, and never being themselves for a single moment. "He who would be free," says a fine thinker, "must not conform." And authority, by bribing people to conform, produces a very gross kind of overfed barbarism amongst us.

With authority, punishment will pass away. This will be a great gain—a gain, in fact, of incalculable value. As one reads history, not in the expurgated editions written for schoolboys and passmen, but in the original authorities of each time, one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; *and a com-*

munity is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime. It obviously follows that the more punishment is inflicted the more crime is produced, and most modern legislation has clearly recognised this, and has made it its task to diminish punishment as far as it thinks it can. Wherever it has really diminished it the results have always been extremely good. The less punishment the less crime. When there is no punishment at all, crime will either cease to exist, or, if it occurs, will be treated by physicians as a very distressing form of dementia, to be cured by care and kindness. For what are called criminals nowadays are not criminals at all. Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime. That indeed is the reason why our criminals are, as a class, so absolutely uninteresting from any psychological point of view. They are not marvellous Macbeths and terrible Vautrins. They are merely what ordinary, respectable, commonplace people would be if they had not got enough to eat. When private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will cease to exist. Of course, all crimes are not crimes against property, though such are the crimes that the English law, valuing what

a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity, if we except the crime of murder, and regard death as worse than penal servitude, a point on which our criminals, I believe, disagree. But though a crime may not be against property, it may spring from the misery and rage and depression produced by our wrong system of property-holding, and so, when that system is abolished, will disappear. When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with by his neighbour, it will not be an object of any interest to him to interfere with any one else. Jealousy, which is an extraordinary source of crime in modern life, is an emotion closely bound up with our conceptions of property, and under Socialism and Individualism will die out. It is remarkable that in communistic tribes jealousy is entirely unknown.

Now, as the State is not to govern, it may be asked what the State is to do. The State is to be a voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. *The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful.* And as I have mentioned the word labour, I cannot help saying that a great deal of nonsense is

being written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labour. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure, and many forms of labour are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine.

And I have no doubt that it will be so. Up to the present, man has been, to a certain extent, the slave of machinery, and there is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man had invented a machine to do his work he began to starve. This, however, is, of course, the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. Five hundred men are, in consequence, thrown out of employment, and, having no work to do, become hungry and take to thieving. The one man secures

the produce of the machine and keeps it, and has five hundred times as much as he should have, and probably, which is of much more importance, a great deal more than he really wants. Were that machine the property of all, every one would benefit by it. It would be an immense advantage to the community. All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. *At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man.* There is no doubt at all that this is the future of machinery, and just as trees grow while the country gentleman is asleep, so while Humanity will be amusing itself, or enjoying cultivated leisure—which, and not labour, is the aim of man—or making beautiful things, or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work. The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are

slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. And when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a depressing East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things for their own joy and the joy of every one else. There will be great storages of force for every city, and for every house if required, and this force man will convert into heat, light, or motion, according to his needs. Is this Utopian? A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

Now, I have said that the community by means of organisation of machinery will supply the useful things, and that the beautiful things will be made by the individual. This is not merely necessary, but it is the only possible way by which we can get either the one or the other. An individual who has

to make things for the use of others, and with reference to their wants and their wishes, does not work with interest, and consequently cannot put into his work what is best in him. Upon the other hand, whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. *A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want.* Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist. *Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known.* I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of individualism that the world has known. Crime, which, under certain conditions, may seem to have created individualism, must take cognisance of other people and interfere with them. It belongs to the sphere of action. But alone, with-

out any reference to his neighbours, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing; and if he does not do it solely for his own pleasure, he is not an artist at all.

And it is to be noted that it is the fact that Art is this intense form of individualism that makes the public try to exercise over it an authority that is as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible. It is not quite their fault. The public have always, and in every age, been badly brought up. They are continually asking Art to be popular, to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before, to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing, to amuse them when they feel heavy after eating too much, and to distract their thoughts when they are wearied of their own stupidity. *Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic.* There is a very wide difference. If a man of science were told that the results of his experiments, and the conclusions that he arrived at, should be of such a character that they would not upset the received popular notions on the subject, or disturb popular prejudice, or hurt the sensibilities of people who

knew nothing about science; if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all—well, nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. Yet it is really a very few years since both philosophy and science were subjected to brutal popular control, to authority in fact—the authority of either the general ignorance of the community, or the terror and greed for power of an ecclesiastical or governmental class. Of course, we have to a very great extent got rid of any attempt on the part of the community or the Church, or the Government, to interfere with the individualism of speculative thought, but the attempt to interfere with the individualism of imaginative art still lingers. In fact, it does more than linger: it is aggressive, offensive, and brutalising.

In England, the arts that have escaped best are the arts in which the public take no interest. Poetry is an instance of what I mean. We have been able to have fine poetry in England because the public do not read it, and consequently do not influence it. The public like to insult poets be-

cause they are individual, but once they have insulted them they leave them alone. In the case of the novel and the drama, arts in which the public do take an interest, the result of the exercise of popular authority has been absolutely ridiculous. No country produces such badly written fiction, such tedious, common work in the novel form, such silly, vulgar plays as England. It must necessarily be so. The popular standard is of such a character that no artist can get to it. It is at once too easy and too difficult to be a popular novelist. It is too easy, because the requirements of the public as far as plot, style, psychology, treatment of life, and treatment of literature are concerned, are within the reach of the very meanest capacity and the most uncultivated mind. It is too difficult, because to meet such requirements the artist would have to do violence to his temperament, would have to write not for the artistic joy of writing, but for the amusement of half-educated people, and so would have to suppress his individualism, forget his culture, annihilate his style, and surrender everything that is valuable in him. In the case of the drama, things are a little better: the theatre-going public like the obvious, it is true, but they do not like the tedious; and burlesque and farcical com-

edy, the two most popular forms, are distinct forms of art. Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical conditions, and in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom. It is when one comes to the higher forms of the drama that the result of popular control is seen. The one thing that the public dislike is novelty. Any attempt to extend the subject-matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of subject-matter. The public dislike novelty because they are afraid of it. It represents to them a mode of Individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses. The public are quite right in their attitude. Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. In Art, the public accept what has been, because they cannot alter it, not because they appreciate it. They swallow their classics whole, and never taste them. They endure them as the inevitable, and, as they cannot mar them, they mouth

about them. Strangely enough, or not strangely, according to one's own views, this acceptance of the classics does a great deal of harm. The uncritical admiration of the Bible and Shakespeare in England is an instance of what I mean. With regard to the Bible, considerations of ecclesiastical authority enter into the matter, so that I need not dwell upon the point.

But in the case of Shakespeare it is quite obvious that the public really see neither the beauties nor the defects of his plays. If they saw the beauties, they would not object to the development of the drama; and if they saw the defects, they would not object to the development of the drama either. *The fact is, the public make use of the classics of a country as a means of checking the progress of Art.* They degrade the classics into authorities. They use them as bludgeons for preventing the free expression of Beauty in new forms. They are always asking a writer why he does not write like somebody else, or a painter why he does not paint like somebody else, quite oblivious of the fact that if either of them did anything of the kind he would cease to be an artist. A fresh mode of Beauty is absolutely distasteful to them, and whenever it appears they get so angry and bewildered that

they always use two stupid expressions—one is that the work of art is grossly unintelligible; the other, that the work of art is grossly immoral. What they mean by these words seems to me to be this. When they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true. The former expression has reference to style; the latter to subject-matter. But they probably use the words very vaguely, as an ordinary mob will use ready-made paving-stones. *There is not a single real poet or prose writer of this century, for instance, on whom the British public have not solemnly conferred diplomas of immorality,* and these diplomas practically take the place, with us, of what in France is the formal recognition of an Academy of Letters, and fortunately make the establishment of such an institution quite unnecessary in England. Of course, the public are very reckless in their use of the word. That they should have called Wordsworth an immoral poet was only to be expected. Wordsworth was a poet. But that they should have called Charles Kingsley an immoral novelist is extraordinary. Kingsley's

prose was not of a very fine quality. Still, there is the word, and they use it as best they can. An artist is, of course, not disturbed by it. The true artist is a man who believes absolutely in himself, because he is absolutely himself. But I can fancy that if an artist produced a work of art in England that immediately on its appearance was recognised by the public, through their medium, which is the public press, as a work that was quite intelligible and highly moral, he would begin to seriously question whether in its creation he had really been himself at all, and consequently whether the work was not quite unworthy of him, and either of a thoroughly second-rate order, or of no artistic value whatsoever.

Perhaps, however, I have wronged the public in limiting them to such words as "immoral," "unintelligible," "exotic," and "unhealthy." There is one other word that they use. That word is "morbid." They do not use it often. The meaning of the word is so simple that they are afraid of using it. Still, they use it sometimes, and, now and then, one comes across it in popular newspapers. It is, of course, a ridiculous word to apply to a work of art. For what is morbidity but a mood of emotion or a mode of thought that one cannot express?

The public are all morbid, because the public can never find expression for anything. *The artist is never morbid. He expresses everything.* He stands outside his subject, and through its medium produces incomparable and artistic effects. To call an artist morbid because he deals with morbidity as his subject-matter is as silly as if one called Shakespeare mad because he wrote *King Lear*.

On the whole, an artist in England gains something by being attacked. His individuality is intensified. He becomes more completely himself. Of course, the attacks are very gross, very impertinent, and very contemptible. But then no artist expects grace from the vulgar mind, or style from the suburban intellect. Vulgarity and stupidity are two very vivid facts in modern life. One regrets them, naturally. But there they are. They are subjects for study, like everything else. And it is only fair to state, with regard to modern journalists, that they always apologise to one in private for what they have written against one in public.

Within the last few years two other adjectives, it may be mentioned, have been added to the very limited vocabulary of art abuse that is at the disposal of the public. One is the word "unhealthy,"

the other is the word "exotic." The latter merely expresses the rage of the momentary mushroom against the immortal, entrancing, and exquisitely lovely orchid. It is a tribute, but a tribute of no importance. The word "unhealthy," however, admits of analysis. It is a rather interesting word. In fact, it is so interesting that the people who use it do not know what it means.

What does it mean? What is a healthy or an unhealthy work of art? All terms that one applies to a work of art, provided that one applies them rationally, have reference to either its style or its subject, or to both together. From the point of view of style, a healthy work of art is one whose style recognises the beauty of the material it employs, be that material one of words or of bronze, of colour or of ivory, and uses that beauty as a factor in producing the æsthetic effect. From the point of view of subject, a healthy work of art is one the choice of whose subject is conditioned by the temperament of the artist, and comes directly out of it. In fine, a healthy work of art is one that has both perfection and personality. Of course, form and substance cannot be separated in a work of art; they are always one. But for purposes of analysis, and setting the wholeness of æsthetic im-

pression aside for a moment, we can intellectually so separate them. An unhealthy work of art, on the other hand, is a work whose style is obvious, old-fashioned, and common, and whose subject is deliberately chosen, not because the artist has any pleasure in it, but because he thinks that the public will pay him for it. *In fact, the popular novel that the public calls healthy is always a thoroughly unhealthy production; and what the public call an unhealthy novel is always a beautiful and healthy work of art.*

I need hardly say that I am not, for a single moment, complaining that the public and the public press misuse these words. I do not see how, with their lack of comprehension of what Art is, they could possibly use them in the proper sense. I am merely pointing out the misuse; and as for the origin of the misuse and the meaning that lies behind it all, the explanation is very simple. It comes from the barbarous conception of authority. It comes from the natural inability of a community corrupted by authority to understand or appreciate Individualism. In a word, it comes from that monstrous and ignorant thing that is called Public Opinion, which, bad and well-meaning as it is when it tries

to control action, is infamous and of evil meaning when it tries to control Thought or Art.

Indeed, there is much more to be said in favour of the physical force of the public than there is in favour of the public's opinion. The former may be fine. The latter must be foolish. It is often said that force is no argument. That, however, entirely depends on what one wants to prove. Many of the most important problems of the last few centuries, such as the continuance of personal government in England, or feudalism in France, have been solved entirely by means of physical force. The very violence of a revolution may make the public grand and splendid for a moment. It was a fatal day when the public discovered that the pen is mightier than the paving-stone, and can be made as offensive as the brick-bat. They at once sought for the journalist, found him, developed him, and made him their industrious and well-paid servant. It is greatly to be regretted, for both their sakes. Behind the barricade there may be much that is noble and heroic. But what is there behind the leading article but prejudice, stupidity, cant, and twaddle? And when these four are joined together they make a terrible force, and constitute the new authority.

In old days men had the rack. Now they have

the press. That is an improvement certainly. But still it is very bad, and wrong, and demoralising. Somebody—was it Burke?—called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time, no doubt. But at the present moment it really is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords Spiritual have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it. We are dominated by Journalism. In America the President reigns for four years, and Journalism governs for ever and ever. Fortunately, in America journalism has carried its authority to the grossest and most brutal extreme. As a natural consequence it has begun to create a spirit of revolt. People are amused by it, or disgusted by it, according to their temperaments. But it is no longer the real force it was. It is not seriously treated. In England, Journalism, not, except in a few well-known instances, having been carried to such excesses of brutality, is still a great factor, a really remarkable power. The tyranny that it proposes to exercise over people's private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary. *The fact is, that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing.* Journalism, conscious of this, and hav-

ing tradesmanlike habits, supplies their demands. In centuries before ours the public nailed the ears of journalists to the pump. That was quite hideous. In this century journalists have nailed their own ears to the keyhole. That is much worse. And what aggravates the mischief is that the journalists who are most to blame are not the amusing journalists who write for what are called Society papers. The harm is done by the serious, thoughtful, earnest journalists, who solemnly, as they are doing at present, will drag before the eyes of the public some incident in the private life of a great statesman, of a man who is a leader of political thought as he is a creator of political force, and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, to give their views, and not merely to give their views, but to carry them into action, to dictate to the man upon all other points, to dictate to his party, to dictate to his country; in fact, to make themselves ridiculous, offensive, and harmful. The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all. In France they manage these things better. There they do not allow the details of the trials that take place in the divorce courts to be published for the amuse-

ment or criticism of the public. All that the public are allowed to know is that the divorce has taken place and was granted on petition of one or other or both of the married parties concerned. In France, in fact, they limit the journalist, and allow the artist almost perfect freedom. *Here we allow absolute freedom to the journalist, and entirely limit the artist.* English public opinion, that is to say, tries to constrain and impede and warp the man who makes things that are beautiful in effect, and compels the journalist to retail things that are ugly, or disgusting, or revolting in fact, so that we have the most serious journalists in the world, and the most indecent newspapers. It is no exaggeration to talk of compulsion. There are possibly some journalists who take a real pleasure in publishing horrible things, or who, being poor, look to scandals as forming a sort of permanent basis for an income. But there are other journalists, I feel certain, men of education and cultivation, who really dislike publishing these things, who know that it is wrong to do so, and only do it because the unhealthy conditions under which their occupation is carried on oblige them to supply the public with what the public wants, and to compete with other journalists in making that supply as full and

satisfying to the gross popular appetite as possible. It is a very degrading position for any body of educated men to be placed in, and I have no doubt that most of them feel it acutely.

However, let us leave what is really a very sordid side of the subject, and return to the question of popular control in the matter of Art, by which I mean Public Opinion dictating to the artist the form which he is to use, the mode in which he is to use it, and the materials with which he is to work. I have pointed out that the arts which have escaped best in England are the arts in which the public have not been interested. They are, however, interested in the drama, and as a certain advance has been made in the drama within the last ten or fifteen years, it is important to point out that this advance is entirely due to a few individual artists refusing to accept the popular want of taste as their standard, and refusing to regard Art as a mere matter of demand and supply. With his marvellous and vivid personality, with a style that has really a true colour-element in it, with his extraordinary power, not over mere mimicry, but over imaginative and intellectual creation, Mr. Irving, had his sole object been to give the public what they wanted, could have produced the commonest plays

in the commonest manner, and made as much success and money as a man could possibly desire. But his object was not that. His object was to realise his own perfection as an artist, under certain conditions, and in certain forms of Art. At first he appealed to the few: now he has educated the many. He has created in the public both taste and temperament. The public appreciate his artistic success immensely. I often wonder, however, whether the public understand that that success is entirely due to the fact that he did not accept their standard, but realised his own. With their standard the Lyceum would have been a sort of second-rate booth, as some of the popular theatres in London are at present. Whether they understand it or not, the fact, however, remains, that taste and temperament have to a certain extent been created in the public, and that the public are capable of developing these qualities. The problem then is, Why do not the public become more civilised? They have the capacity. What stops them?

The thing that stops them, it must be said again, is their desire to exercise authority over the artist and over works of art. To certain theatres, such as the Lyceum and the Haymarket, the public seem to come in a proper mood. In both of these thea-

tres there have been individual artists, who have succeeded in creating in their audiences—and every theatre in London has its own audience—the temperament to which Art appeals. And what is that temperament? It is the temperament of receptivity. That is all.

If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. *The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art.* The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be or should not be, the more likely he is to understand and appreciate the work of art in question. This is, of course, quite obvious in the case of the vulgar theatre-going public of English men and women. But it is equally true of what are called educated people. For an educated person's ideas of Art are drawn naturally from what Art has been, whereas the new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been; and to measure it by the standard of the past is to

measure it by a standard on the rejection of which its real perfection depends. A temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative conditions, new and beautiful impressions is the only temperament that can appreciate a work of art. And true as this is in the case of the appreciation of sculpture and painting, it is still more true of the appreciation of such arts as the drama. For a picture and a statue are not at war with Time. They take no count of its succession. In one moment their unity may be apprehended. In the case of literature it is different. Time must be traversed before the unity of effect is realised. And so, in the drama, there may occur in the first act of the play something whose real artistic value may not be evident to the spectator till the third or fourth act is reached. Is the silly fellow to get angry and call out, and disturb the play, and annoy the artists? No. The honest man is to sit quietly, and know the delightful emotions of wonder, curiosity, and suspense. He is not to go to the play to lose a vulgar temper. He is to go to the play to realise an artistic temperament. He is to go to the play to gain an artistic temperament. He is not the arbiter of the work of art. He is one who is admitted to contemplate

the work of art, and, if the work be fine, to forget in its contemplation all the egotism that mars him —the egotism of his ignorance, or the egotism of his information. This point about the drama is hardly, I think, sufficiently recognised. I can quite understand that were *Macbeth* produced for the first time before a modern London audience, many of the people present would strongly and vigorously object to the introduction of the witches in the first act, with their grotesque phrases and their ridiculous words. But when the play is over one realises that the laughter of the witches in *Macbeth* is as terrible as the laughter of madness in *Lear,* more terrible than the laughter of Iago in the tragedy of the Moor. No spectator of art needs a more perfect mood of receptivity than the spectator of a play. The moment he seeks to exercise authority he becomes the avowed enemy of Art and of himself. Art does not mind. It is he who suffers.

With the novel it is the same thing. Popular authority and the recognition of popular authority are fatal. Thackeray's *Esmond* is a beautiful work of art because he wrote it to please himself. In his other novels, in *Pendennis,* in *Philip,* in *Vanity Fair* even, at times, he is too conscious

of the public, and spoils his work by appealing directly to the sympathies of the public, or by directly mocking at them. *A true artist takes no notice whatever of the public. The public are to him non-existent.* He has no poppied or honeyed cakes through which to give the monster sleep or sustenance. He leaves that to the popular novelist. One incomparable novelist we have now in England, Mr. George Meredith. There are better artists in France, but France has no one whose view of life is so large, so varied, so imaginatively true. There are tellers of stories in Russia who have a more vivid sense of what pain in fiction may be. But to him belongs philosophy in fiction. His people not merely live, but they live in thought. One can see them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is soul in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic. And he who made them, those wonderful quickly moving figures, made them for his own pleasure, and has never asked the public what they wanted, has never cared to know what they wanted, has never allowed the public to dictate to him or influence him in any way, but has gone on intensifying his own personality, and producing his own individual work. At first none came to him. That did not

matter. Then the few came to him. That did not change him. The many have come now. He is still the same. He is an incomparable novelist.

With the decorative arts it is not different. The public clung with really pathetic tenacity to what I believe were the direct traditions of the Great Exhibition of international vulgarity, traditions that were so appalling that the houses in which people lived were only fit for blind people to live in. Beautiful things began to be made, beautiful colours came from the dyer's hand, beautiful patterns from the artist's brain, and the use of beautiful things and their value and importance were set forth. The public were really very indignant. They lost their temper. They said silly things. No one minded. No one was a whit the worse. No one accepted the authority of public opinion. And now it is almost impossible to enter any modern house without seeing some recognition of good taste, some recognition of the value of lovely surroundings, some sign of appreciation of beauty. In fact, people's houses are, as a rule, quite charming nowadays. People have been to a very great extent civilised. It is only fair to state, however, that the extraordinary success of the revolution in house decoration and furniture and the like has not really

been due to the majority of the public developing a very fine taste in such matters. It has been chiefly due to the fact that the craftsmen of things so appreciated the pleasure of making what was beautiful, and woke to such a vivid consciousness of the hideousness and vulgarity of what the public had previously wanted, that they simply starved the public out. It would be quite impossible at the present moment to furnish a room as rooms were furnished a few years ago, without going for everything to an auction of second-hand furniture from some third-rate lodging-house. The things are no longer made. However they may object to it, people must nowadays have something charming in their surroundings. Fortunately for them, their assumption of authority in these art matters came to entire grief.

It is evident, then, that all authority in such things is bad. People sometimes inquire what form of government is most suitable for an artist to live under. To this question there is only one answer. *The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.* Authority over him and his art is ridiculous. It has been stated that under despotisms artists have produced lovely work. This is not quite so. Artists have visited

despots, not as subjects to be tyrannised over, but as wandering wonder-makers, as fascinating vagrant personalities, to be entertained and charmed and suffered to be at peace, and allowed to create. There is this to be said in favour of the despot, that he, being an individual, may have culture, while the mob, being a monster, has none. One who is an Emperor and King may stoop down to pick up a brush for a painter, but when the democracy stoops down it is merely to throw mud. And yet the democracy have not so far to stoop as the Emperor. In fact, when they want to throw mud they have not to stoop at all. But there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad.

There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannises over the body. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannises over soul and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People. The Prince may be cultivated. Many Princes have been. Yet in the Prince there is danger. One thinks of Dante at the bitter feast in Verona, of Tasso in Ferrara's madman's cell. It is better for the artist not to live with Princes. The Pope may

be cultivated. Many Popes have been; the bad Popes have been. The bad Popes loved Beauty, almost as passionately, nay, with as much passion as the good Popes hated Thought. To the wickedness of the Papacy humanity owes much. The goodness of the Papacy owes a terrible debt to humanity. Yet, though the Vatican has kept the rhetoric of its thunders and lost the rod of its lightning, it is better for the artist not to live with Popes. It was a Pope who said of Cellini to a conclave of Cardinals that common laws and common authority were not made for men such as he; but it was a Pope who thrust Cellini into prison, and kept him there till he sickened with rage, and created unreal visions for himself, and saw the gilded sun enter his room, and grew so enamoured of it that he sought to escape, and crept out from tower to tower, and falling through dizzy air at dawn, maimed himself, and was by a vine-dresser covered with vine leaves, and carried in a cart to one who, loving beautiful things, had care of him. There is danger in Popes. And as for the People, what of them and their authority? Perhaps of them and their authority one has spoken enough. Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious, and obscene. It is

impossible for the artist to live with the People. All despots bribe. The people bribe and brutalise. Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Some one has done them a great wrong. They have marred themselves by imitation of their inferiors. They have taken the sceptre of the Prince. How should they use it? They have taken the triple tiara of the Pope. How should they carry its burden? They are as a clown whose heart is broken. They are as a priest whose soul is not yet born. Let all who love Beauty pity them. Though they themselves love not Beauty, yet let them pity themselves. Who taught them the trick of tyranny?

There are many other things that one might point out. One might point out how the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. One might point out how Louis XIV, by creating the modern state, destroyed the individualism of the artist, and made things monstrous in their monotony of repetition, and contemptible in their conformity to rule, and destroyed throughout all

France all those fine freedoms of expression that had made tradition new in beauty, and new modes one with antique form. But the past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are.

It will, of course, be said that such a scheme as is set forth here is quite unpractical, and goes against human nature. This is perfectly true. It is unpractical, and it goes against human nature. This is why it is worth carrying out, and that is why one proposes it. For what is a practical scheme? *A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions.* But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The conditions will be done away with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it. The systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not on its growth and development. The

error of Louis XIV was that he thought human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. It was an admirable result. All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable.

It is to be noted also that Individualism does not come to man with any sickly cant about duty, which merely means doing what other people want because they want it; or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice, which is merely a survival of savage mutilation. *In fact, it does not come to man with any claims upon him at all. It comes naturally and inevitably out of man.* It is the point to which all development tends. It is the differentiation to which all organisms grow. It is the perfection that is inherent in every mode of life, and towards which every mode of life quickens. And so Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him. It does not try to force people to be good. It knows that people are good when they are let alone. Man will develop Individualism out of himself. Man is now so developing Individualism. To ask whether Individualism is practical is like asking whether Evolution is practical. *Evolution is the law of life,*

and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially arrested growth, or of disease, or of death.

Individualism will also be unselfish and unaffected. It has been pointed out that one of the results of the extraordinary tyranny of authority is that words are absolutely distorted from their proper and simple meaning, and are used to express the obverse of their right signification. What is true about Art is true about Life. A man is called affected, nowadays, if he dresses as he likes to dress. But in doing that he is acting in a perfectly natural manner. Affectation, in such matters, consists in dressing according to the views of one's neighbour, whose views, as they are the views of the majority, will probably be extremely stupid. Or a man is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development. But this is the way in which every one should live. *Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.* And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them. Selfishness always aims at creating

around it an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognises infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it. It is not selfish to think for oneself. A man who does not think for himself does not think at all. It is grossly selfish to require of one's neighbour that he should think in the same way, and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can think, he will probably think differently. If he cannot think, it is monstrous to require thought of any kind from him. A red rose is not selfish because it wants to be a red rose. It would be horribly selfish if it wanted all the other flowers in the garden to be both red and roses. Under Individualism people will be quite natural and absolutely unselfish, and will know the meanings of the words, and realise them in their free, beautiful lives. Nor will men be egotistic as they are now. For the egotist is he who makes claims upon others, and the Individualist will not desire to do that. It will not give him pleasure. When man has realised Individualism, he will also realise sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously. Up to the present man has hardly cultivated sympathy at all. He has merely sympathy with pain, and sympathy with pain is not the highest form of sympathy.

All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety. We become afraid that we ourselves might be as the leper or as the blind, and that no man would have care of us. It is curiously limiting, too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom. The wider sympathy is, of course, the more difficult. It requires more unselfishness. Anybody can sympathise with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature—it requires, in fact, the nature of a true Individualist—to sympathise with a friend's success. In the modern stress of competition and struggle for place, such sympathy is naturally rare, and is also very much stifled by the immoral ideal of uniformity of type and conformity to rule which is so prevalent everywhere, and is perhaps most obnoxious in England.

Sympathy with pain there will, of course, always be. It is one of the first instincts of man. The animals which are individual, the higher animals that is to say, share it with us. But it must be remembered that while sympathy with joy in-

tensifies the sum of joy in the world, sympathy with pain does not really diminish the amount of pain. It may make man better able to endure evil, but the evil remains. Sympathy with consumption does not cure consumption; that is what Science does. And when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and Science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous lives of others.

For it is through joy that the Individualism of the future will develop itself. *Christ made no attempt to reconstruct society, and consequently the Individualism that He preached to man could be realised only through pain or in solitude.* The ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely. But man is naturally social. Even the Thebaid became peopled at last. And though the cenobite realises his personality, it is often an impoverished personality that he so realises. Upon the other hand, the terrible truth that pain is a mode through which man may realise himself exercised a wonderful fascination over the world. Shallow speakers and

shallow thinkers in pulpits and on platforms often talk about the world's worship of pleasure, and whine against it. But it is rarely in the world's history that its ideal has been one of joy and beauty. The worship of pain has far more often dominated the world. Mediævalism, with its saints and martyrs, its love of self-torture, its wild passion for wounding itself, its gashing with knives, and its whipping with rods—Mediævalism is real Christianity, and the mediæval Christ is the real Christ. When the Renaissance dawned upon the world, and brought with it the new ideals of the beauty of life and the joy of living, men could not understand Christ. Even Art shows us that. The painters of the Renaissance drew Christ as a little boy playing with another boy in a palace or a garden, or lying back in His mother's arms, smiling at her, or at a flower, or at a bright bird; or as a noble, stately figure moving nobly through the world; or as a wonderful figure rising in a sort of ecstasy from death to life. Even when they drew Him crucified, they drew Him as a beautiful God on whom evil men had inflicted suffering. But He did not preoccupy them much. What delighted them was to paint the men and women whom they admired, and to show the loveliness of this lovely earth.

They painted many religious pictures; in fact, they painted far too many, and the monotony of type and motive is wearisome and was bad for art. It was the result of the authority of the public in art matters, and it is to be deplored. But their soul was not in the subject. Raphael was a great artist when he painted his portrait of the Pope. When he painted his Madonnas and infant Christs, he is not a great artist at all. Christ had no message for the Renaissance, which was wonderful because it brought an ideal at variance with His, and to find the presentation of the real Christ we must go to mediæval art. There He is one maimed and marred; one who is not comely to look on, because Beauty is a joy; one who is not in fair raiment, because that may be a joy also: He is a beggar who has a marvellous soul; He is a leper whose soul is divine; He needs neither property nor health; He is a God realising His perfection through pain.

The evolution of man is slow. The injustice of men is great. It was necessary that pain should be put forward as a mode of self-realisation. Even now in some places in the world, the message of Christ is necessary. No one who lived in modern Russia could possibly realise his perfection except by pain. A few Russian artists have realised them-

selves in Art, in a fiction that is mediæval in character, because its dominant note is the realisation of men through suffering. But for those who are not artists, and to whom there is no mode of life but the actual life of fact, pain is the only door to perfection. A Russian who lives happily under the present system of government in Russia must either believe that man has no soul, or that, if he has, it is not worth while developing. A Nihilist who rejects all authority, because he knows authority to be evil, and who welcomes all pain, because through that he realises his personality, is a real Christian. To him the Christian ideal is a true thing.

And yet, Christ did not revolt against authority. He accepted the imperial authority of the Roman Empire and paid tribute. He endured the ecclesiastical authority of the Jewish Church, and would not repel its violence by any violence of His own. He had, as I said before, no scheme for the reconstruction of society. But the modern world has schemes. It proposes to do away with poverty and the suffering that it entails. It desires to get rid of pain, and the suffering that pain entails. It trusts to Socialism and to Science as its methods. What it aims at is an Individualism expressing

itself through joy. This Individualism will be larger, fuller, lovelier than any Individualism has ever been. Pain is not the ultimate mode of perfection. It is merely provisional and a protest. It has reference to wrong, unhealthy, unjust surroundings. When the wrong, and the disease, and the injustice are removed, it will have no further place. It will have done its work. It was a great work, but it is almost over. Its sphere lessens every day.

Nor will man miss it. *For what man has sought for is, indeed, neither pain nor pleasure, but simply Life.* Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all pleasurable to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilised, more himself. Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. It will be what the Greeks sought for, but could not, except in Thought, realise completely, because they had slaves, and fed them; it will be what the Renaissance sought for, but could not realise completely

except in Art, because it had slaves, and starved them. It will be complete, and through it each man will attain to his perfection. The new Individualism is the new Hellenism.

OSCAR WILDE.

FINIS.

Of Him Who Died at No. 13.

By Leonard Charles van Noppen.

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OF HIM WHO DIED AT No. 13.

Sad surely it was, the funeral I witnessed on that dismal autumn day toward the close of the year 1900. And I remember how one who stood with me, shivering in the portals of old St. Germain des Près, one who had known the dead in summer days, said mournfully:

"And that's the last of Oscar Wilde! the pet of society, the æsthete, *bon vivant* and accomplished man of the world, borne to a pauper's grave—followed by a single coach and two friends!"

Then with great feeling—and never lines more *apropos,* more gruesome and more pathetic—he quoted that couplet of Tom Hood's:

"Rattle his bones over the stones—
'Tis only a pauper, whom nobody owns."

"Poor Oscar!" he sighed. From William Theodore Peters, a young American, long resident in Paris, came these burdened words. Gifted with a

rare and delicate genius, he was hailed as a rising poet and gave promise of many things which his recent death, sudden and unexpected, has left to be listed among the great unfulfilled.

There, too, was Charles Sibleigh, that bohemian of bohemians, whose French version of *Omar,* since published, has won golden plaudits from the critics of both hemispheres. He likewise was oppressed by the weight of that strange hour.

It was a cold, disagreeable day. A drizzling rain was falling and the towers of Paris loomed like mighty memories through the spectral mist. It was quite in keeping, too, that we who stood there, watching the close of a great human tragedy, should shiver and grow strangely sad, awed into whispers.

To me who knew Wilde only in his work, Peters and Sibleigh, whom I then met for the first time, told many particulars of those last, lonely, lingering months, those hopeless days of heavy-footed, horror-hooded hours, which closed a career the most brilliant and withal the most erratic of our generation.

Only recently a writer in *The Critic,* Mr. George Sylvester Viereck, advanced, evidently to his own satisfaction and to the mystification of

many, an array of ingenious arguments to prove that Oscar Wilde was still living. His article, fortified with much circumstantial and some hearsay evidence, almost convinces. To begin with, the writer talked with a man who half-intimated that he had only lately conversed with the living Wilde, and then, when his questioner betrayed a too keen interest, mysteriously refused to say more.

This may be pretty good evidence. All that it lacks of being proof is a convincing testimonial as to the seriousness of the witness. The superadded suggestion that Wilde could easily pass his life in some little town of Southern France or in a Spanish monastery, as a silent looker-on, is hard to reconcile, however, with his presence here in New York.

Mr. Viereck also considers it significant that the following startling lines should appear only in the German edition of the *De Profundis*: "Terrible as are the dead when they return from their graves, the living that come back from the grave are far more terrible." I confess that to me this is no less enigmatical, and I agree with Mr. Viereck that it would be altogether in accord with Wilde's passion for the paradoxical to make his death the crowning paradox of all. That he,

from whom only the unexpected was to be expected, should, after the turbulent notoriety of his trial and imprisonment had been succeeded by the calm fame of the *De Profundis,* return to England, redeemed by renunciation, would be not at all surprising, *if he were still alive.*

It may be that Mr. Viereck's mysterious informant had met the *doppelganger,* or double, of the author of *The Garden of Eros.* According to Swedenborg, things even stranger have happened.

So much then for Mr. Viereck's special pleading, which would be quite sufficient to persuade me that we were systematically haunted by the living Wilde, had I not happened at his funeral. I must, therefore, at least until absolute proof is forthcoming, refuse to believe with Mr. Viereck that in that lonely grave which is supposed to contain all that is mortal of Oscar Wilde "sleeps some poor beggar or some honest bourgeois who never dreamed he should rest in poet's tomb."

While in Paris, during and after the closing weeks of the International Exposition of 1900, I saw one day, in the Paris edition of the *New York Herald,* an announcement of the death of Oscar Wilde. The article added that the poet died in obscure lodgings, in the Rue ——(?), No. 13. As

I greatly admired some of the poems of this the most unfortunate of poets, I yielded to the not unnatural impulse to behold the scene of his unhappy end. I was soon in the Rue —— (?) —the name has escaped me—near Des Beaux Arts. It was a narrow street, flanked by houses of most forbidding aspect. As the numbers were so blurred as to be quite undecipherable, I knocked, to make sure, at the door of the seventh house from the right. A woman, none too tidy, responded. I inquired if an Englishman, Mr. Wilde, *had lived there.* "Wait a moment," she replied, ushering me into a large room furnished with bountiful bareness, "and I'll call Monsieur Ross." As I had not anticipated this postponement of an answer, it was with some dismay that I saw her disappear up the narrow stairs. But it was now too late to retreat; for already I heard my presence announced. Mr. Ross immediately descended, and, after introducing himself, inquired if I was "a friend of Wilde's?" I replied that I knew the poet only through his work, some of which had profoundly impressed me. I added that I had come with no intention of intruding, and that I was sorry he had been disturbed—but would he tell me when Mr. Wilde was to be buried?

"To-morrow morning," he said, "at the Church of St. Germain des Près—about 9 o'clock."

The next day, as I approached this historic pile, in many respects the most interesting of the churches of Paris, I saw, on the street opposite the western portal, a hearse and one carriage. Proceeding within, I found that the burial service had just begun. The officiating priest, a gigantic figure with a thick black beard, a member, probably, of one of the monkish orders, solemnly intoned the ritual for the dead. Scattered throughout the huge edifice were some thirty-five or forty persons, among them, I was told afterwards, several of the most talented artists in Paris. Also there were two or three women, heavily veiled.

The deep intonations of the priest, the awesome atmosphere of the ancient church, and, above all, that simple coffin and its passionless dead, combined to make the occasion most impressive. Sitting there in the shadow of tombs, before the unapparent Presence of the Mystery, I could not but brood on that life of promise, blighted ere its noon. And it seemed truly paradoxical, and therefore not unaccordant, that the last chapter of such a career should end here, before the altar of the

immaculate Virgin, where, to quote Wilde himself:

"The crimson stain that was of Cain
Became Christ's snow-white seal."

That madness of mockery, that *"amour de l'impossible,"* that life of "unlimited desire," found here their silent ending. And he, that wanton worldling, lay crushed and broken, shrouded with shadows—the hunted wanderer brought, at last, to bay, weighed down with the scorn of the world! And, thus heavily weighted, he was now, it seemed, about to be cast into a deep of infamy, into that forgetful sea which never gives up its dead:

"For none can tell to what red hell
His sightless soul may stray."

Insistently the lines of the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* stalked through my mind, pointing, like his own dance of phantoms, accusing finger at their author, lying so mute and so motionless in that mysterious casket:

"But he does not win who plays with sin
In the secret House of Shame"—

they shrieked; and then, like a wail, came the memory of other lines. the one crowding out the other:

"The man had killed the thing he loved
And so he had to die"—

"For each man kills the thing he loves.
By each let this be heard:
Some do it with a bitter look;
Some with a flattering word;
The coward does it with a kiss;
The brave man with a sword."

Too true, he had greatly sinned who lay there, wrapt in the long white silence. He had invited, mockingly, the wrath of God and the anger of men; and his pride had suffered a fall. But for all that, bad as he was—and I could not but believe he was more mad than bad—his was a quivering soul impaled on its own passions, fettered doubtless by chains of heredity. Then why should any be swift to cast the first stone?

He himself had confessed his sins, and this without boasting and without blasphemy, in that grand chant of adoration, the *E Tenebris,* which always has impressed me as among the few great

sonnets since Milton's on the Piedmontese. And now, mingling with the sonorous Latin of the ritual, this splendid outburst of despair, which Wilde, in some tumultuous moment of remorse, called from his abysmal agony, rolled like the billows of a stormy sea, line after noble line, through my mind:

"Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach Thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on Thy Lake of Galilee:
The wine of life is spilt upon the sand,
My heart is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly.
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie,
If I this night before God's throne should stand.
'He sleeps, perchance, or rideth to the chase,
Like Baäl, when his prophets howled that name
From morn to noon on Carmel's smitten height.'
Nay, peace, I shall behold, before the night,
The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame,
The wounded hands, the weary human face."

Such were the thoughts that blended with the benisons of the priest; and to me, though a Protestant, it seemed that religion had seemed never so

holy as here in the Mother Catholic Church, which, with open arms, had welcomed that sin-stained, homeless wanderer, banned from the limited mercy of man. Like a chant the prophetic close of his *Easter Day* floated back to me:

"My heart stole back across wide wastes of years,
To One who wandered by a lonely sea,
And sought, in vain, for any place of rest:
'Foxes have holes and every bird its nest;
I, only I, must wander wearily,
And bruise my feet, and drink wine salt with tears.'"

Such bitterness he was himself to know, even such anguish and such tears. With him, however, was never that sustaining sense of innocence which could make the rough way smooth. Peace could come, if at all, only through the breaking of the heart in him. How well he understood this!

"Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win.
How else may man make straight his plan
And cleanse his soul from sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?"

The service came to an end. The upper lid of the coffin was then raised, so that any who wished to do so might look upon the face of the dead. Accordingly, a number of the curious and a few, very few, of the sad, walked, one by one, by the casket, making the sign of the cross as they passed. Among them I noticed a pale, slender young man, who, so Peters told me afterwards, was Lord Alfred Douglas. So far as I could see, he betrayed no emotion as he gazed for the last time on the face of his friend.

Let me add, *en passant,* that two great ancestors of Douglas, both mediæval knights, are ingraved in this same church. Their epitaphs and escutcheons, emblazoned on the walls, could easily be read from the chancel, where now, for a moment, stood the latest scion of that mighty line. Was this no more than a strange coincidence?

The coffin was then carried by the pall-bearers to the hearse, which, after Mr. Ross and the pale young man had entered the one coach, was driven rapidly away. As I gazed after the departing dead, I recalled Wilde's own grotesquerie, terrible now:

> "And hurriedly they took him out
> And hid him in a hole."

Wilde was the victim of his own imagination, a man unusually susceptible to the suggestions of sense—blighted with super-sensibility. This he realized only too well.

> "For he who lives more lives than one,
> More deaths than one must die,"

he says in his great Ballad. He was forever experimenting with his Ego. "One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin," he somewhere soliloquizes; and this idea is the false star that lured him to the abyss. His self-consciousness was at times almost prophetic. His very end he seems to have anticipated. And as he mounted, soar on soar, he seems to have realised that he was only adding distance to his fall.

In that brilliant essay, entitled *Pen, Pencil and Poison,* where he analysed—how subtly!—the art and the life of the arch-criminal Wainewright, Wilde evidently foresaw his own inevitable fate. It is just such a criticism as might now be written about Wilde himself. In him, however, will be discovered not a gleam of that malevolence which made the life of Wainewright so monstrous. Not even his worst enemy can say that Oscar was envious, unjust, or indifferent to human need. That

he possessed, to a great degree, the social passion is proved by his *Humanitad*.

Paradoxical as he was, he was yet consistent in his inconsistencies. With him insincerity was often but an unconscious affectation. Sovran of genius, he was long content to be a mere jester at the court of the King; content, indeed, to receive the mock homage paid to the motley. Before his other, his higher self, he would permit no incense to be swung; and, that he might obviate all suspicion of seriousness, he must needs tinkle continually the bell-tasselled cap of Harlequin. Yet at heart he was at times profoundly serious; but his lamp of volition, so bright in the dark, was soon dimmed in the blazing palaces of pleasure. All his good resolutions, and of these no man had greater store, gravitated, sooner or later, back to the senses. He was true only to his moods—the slave, not the master, of the living moment. He was not one to forget himself into immortality. He forgot only the future and remembered nothing but the present. Of that fluidity of purpose which is the defect of the impressionable quality, he is the enduring example. The uncompleted circle of his days was a continuous compromise with the straight line of virtue. Always his will was drawn

Egoward, till even life was a matter of style. It became at last a tragedy, where character, starting a succession of inevitable sequences, caused the death of the protagonist.

Red, blood-red, was the color of his sins; but this, at least, may be said of him: he was no whited sepulchre. Over the conventions he walked indifferent—walked into the very yawn of penalty. "The only virtue I claim," he said once, "is that I have practised none of the seven deadly virtues." In this paradox is to be found the philosophy of his conduct and the psychology of his thinking. That he might dazzle the more he posed in dark places. His follies, indeed, seem assumed for the occasion. It was his caprice to tease his time into guesses wide of his meaning; his whim, to leave his critics a testament of irreconcilable contradictions. And in this he has succeeded.

Wilde was a belated Athenian turned iconoclast. He is forever exhibiting romantic surprises, caged in a classic style. In his "House Beautiful," columned like a Greek temple, the windows look, now on sunny lawns loud with laughter, now on gloomy Gothic forests, where chanting pilgrims pause at moon-pale shrines. After the reign of revelry comes barefoot Penance treading thorns.

Few guessed that beneath that ambrosial sparkle of speech were sombre depths troubled at night by the wings of the angel Conscience. It was when he appeared most himself that he was most concealed. The world thrilled through his pleasures, but it was God who throbbed in his pain. In his soul, Villon, Keats and Heine met to dispute with Thomas à Kempis, and it was the mystic who spoke last.

For all his errors, and though the sense of moral values was never his, he aspired to the pure ether of the spiritual. He stood hushed before the Beauty of Holiness. No man of our time was more enamoured of the unearthly. None felt so keenly that mystic adoration, the worship of the artist, which only three English poets have made beautifully manifest: Spenser, Rossetti and Wilde. And of these three, Wilde comes nearest, in depth and in sincerity, those greatest of mystics, Dante and Vondel. This is hardly a matter susceptible of proof. I can only cite, as evidence, besides the lines already quoted, a stanza or two from the *Humanitad*:

"O smitten mouth! O forehead crowned with thorn!
O chalice of all common miseries!

Thou for our sakes that loved Thee not hast borne
An agony of endless centuries,
And we were vain and ignorant, nor knew
That when we stabbed Thy heart it was our own
real hearts we slew.

* * * * * *

"Is this the end of all that primal force
Which, in its changes being still the same,
From eyeless Chaos cleft its upward course,
Through ravenous seas and whirling rocks and
flame,
Till the suns met in heaven and began
Their cycles, and the morning stars sang, and the
Word was Man?

"Nay, nay, we are but crucified, and though
The bloody sweat falls from our brows like rain,
Loosen the nails—we shall come down, I know,
Staunch the red wounds—we shall be whole
again,
No need have we of hyssop-laden rod—
That which is purely human, that is Godlike, that
is God!"

When this was written there was nothing to be gained by the Christ-pose, with which epithet some

seem content to dismiss the *De Profundis*. For at that time the author apparently aspired to nothing higher than to be acclaimed the pattern of dandies and the prince of wits. To regard these poems, therefore, as admissions—wrung from the writer's very soul—of that spiritual beauty to which he was never blind, is an attitude not untenable.

Surely the art of those last years should be enough to chasten his memory; for here is the real Oscar Wilde, the heart of gold purged of its earthly dross. Of his divided self let us keep the purer part. To forget the rest is better than to excuse or to condone. He is dead and his limitations died with him. He denied his Master; true, but not thrice!

It is a sad story, the annals of those last years; and yet it may be that it was not until then, when he had lost the world, that he truly found himself and his art. For from the *De Profundis,* that great prose-poem of a dying soul, rises that fragrance beyond all fragrance—the incense of a life redeemed.